# The Constellation and The Winters Tale

**by fandomfairytales**

**Summary**

Hermione decides to return to school rather than begin Auror training. She arrives early to settle in, blissfully unaware that her co-Head is none other than Draco Malfoy... that is until she receives a letter that begins to change everything and is set on the path to a happily ever after she couldn't have foreseen.

**Notes**

i dont even know where this idea came from i just wanted to write a mutual 'ive had a secret thing for you for ages' fic so here goes nothing- enjoy :)

there's no update schedule on this i just started it to get it out of my head, but I will update as i write

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Disclaimer: all credit to J.K.
I'm just using this for writing practice because... reasons :)

See the end of the work for more notes.
Hermione had never expected to feel normal after the war, but in the months that followed she slipped further into old routines and managed to find a semblance of herself (only the nightmares were new and the additional attention from the press). Perhaps she lost herself in keeping busy around the Burrow, but it was what she needed to cope with her grief; she had shed enough tears for her family and friends and she was ever so tired.

Going back to Hogwarts to complete her education had been a given and she knew she would find her place among her peers with ease, even with the glaringly obvious absence of her two best friends hanging over her.

She knew things had changed at Hogwarts after the war, the exterior may have been repaired but the castle still bore the scars of the atrocities and tragedies witnessed by the centuries old stones. Now it was a place for healing, for promotion of inter house unity and fostering understanding through therapy groups, school counselors. Hermione had no intention of discussing her experiences or issues with anyone. Thankfully she wouldn’t have to worry about her housemates finding out either; as head girl she would be lodging with the head boy in a far more private dormitory.

The new term hadn’t officially commenced yet, but Hermione decided to settle in early. Reaching her dorm, she stepped though the portrait bearing a knight on a black stallion after a good two minutes waiting for a chance to speak the password (it seemed he enjoyed crass jokes and she had to hide a small smile so as not to encourage the painting too much).

Stepping into the common room was like coming home, it was inviting and warm despite the lacking house colours. She scanned the living space taking note of the comfortable lounges set near the fireplace, the practical twin desks, small study nook and the small kitchenette nestled near the window

“This will do nicely” she stated to the empty space.

Beside the kitchenette was a small hallway which was mirrored on the other side leading to her counterpart’s room. She turned and walked down her own hall and was glad to see familiar red and gold accents in her room. Bookshelves lined the wall and she couldn’t wait to fill them. Sitting on her bed she hadn’t even bothered to wonder who would be taking up the mantle of head boy (though secretly she hoped it might be Neville, so at least she would have a friend close by).

The afternoon passed in relative peace, she cooked a light meal, preferring to do it the muggle way and curled up with a book in the hope of tiring herself out.

Peace was not a concept that lasted and sometime around eleven she was stirred from a particularly engrossing chapter by the incessant fussing of Errol and a second unfamiliar eagle owl against the window. Opening the window and unfastening the letters, she gave each owl a small treat from the kitchen and sent both on their way. Returning to her little self-made nest, she opened Errol’s letter.

‘Mione,

I can’t wait to see you next week, feels like it’s been ages since you left and I miss you.
How’s the new dorm!? Better than the usual I’ll bet? though I’m sure you’re missing Gryffindor
tower, at least you’ll have a new friend to ‘study’ with up there. Have you heard who it is yet? I heard a few rumors, but I think I’ll let you find out for yourself. If I’m right, it’ll be the funniest thing to ever happen at Hogwarts.

The boys have been doing wonderfully with their auror training and have settled in well; a few minor scrapes and bruises aside. They asked me to pass on their love while they’re off on some training mission or other.

speaking of Ron, Mum has been fussing over the time you two will be spending apart, I didn’t have the heart to tell her that the you stayed friends. Besides I’d much rather be a witness than a participant when you break the news to her. Do it soon though for all our sakes.

Anyways when I get there you better be ready to give me the grand tour of the head’s digs, I want to see what the rest of us are missing out on.

All my love
Gin.

Hermione placed the letter down with a caring smile and absentmindedly picked open the seal on the other one, thinking more about what she was going to say to Molly than what her hands were occupying themselves with.

Pulling the parchment from the envelope and unfolding it, she was met with well structured, neat cursive, while unfamiliar it still had not processed that this letter was something out of the ordinary.

Miss Granger
Granger
Hermione,

(I’m sorry, I wasn’t sure how to start this).
There’s quite a lot I need to say to you but its difficult to find the right words (though most of it I would like to do in person, should you allow me the opportunity)

I felt that I should at least inform you, in the hopes of lessening the blow, that I am returning to Hogwarts this year and have been selected to act as head boy. I tried to talk McGonagall out of it but she was adamant that taking on the responsibility was an integral part of my being allowed to attend this year, so I had no choice but to accept. If I’m honest I am honoured to be working and learning alongside you.

Before we see each other, I would like to express how much I regret having treated you the way I did in our previous years at school (I shouldn’t hide behind parchment for this. But it must be said and will be said again in person).

After the war, I was finally free to decide on my own beliefs and opinions. Removed from the influence of my family and the majority of those considered friends, I saw the truth of my life and my beliefs. It took time to come to terms with, but I came to realise that my life had allowed few pathways to follow, prejudice was not something I chose, but something that I was taught. Besides how could anyone such as you be considered less simply because of your lineage: ‘The Brightest Witch of our Age’ is proof enough that blood doesn’t define us. I just should have realised it sooner.

I will not ask your forgiveness my actions, nor do I want to be excused for the things I said and did in the past. Mother keeps telling me I need to apologize and let it go, but I deserve to be held accountable; so rather than ask for token forgiveness, I would like the chance to earn it, provided
you are willing to give me such a chance. Even that may be asking too much, and I can certainly understand if that is how you see it. Maybe I’m a coward for asking this way, but then I’ve always been a coward, so I suppose its not so out of character.

It would also seem I’m unsure of how to end this too, all I can hope is that you’ve even read this far. Maybe you didn’t make it past the seal to see that poor attempt at humor. Never mind.

Yours.
Draco Malfoy.

Not often rendered speechless, Hermione had to wonder if she had hallucinated the signature at the end; not to mention the rest of it. Re reading the letter and checking the seal confirmed that she was not in fact dreaming or hallucinating at all (though she did pinch herself just to be sure). There was plenty to be shocked about after coming to terms with the reality of his letter. Malfoy being head Boy was surprisingly far down the list of things now weighing on her mind.

He had apologised. Then promised to apologise again.

Properly…
In person…
Unprompted.

Godric help her, this was all so surreal. Evidently he was being honest and sincere, polite without detachment (rather the opposite... coming off as hyper-aware of her possible reactions to his admissions).

Hermione stood and set the letter on the desk, not wanting to address how it truly made her feel. Though one line stuck in her mind.

“Prejudice was not something I chose, but something that I was taught”

She took a deep breath and walked back to her bedroom deciding that if she was going to allow her mind to process his letter she may as well let it lull her to sleep. She settled in and began to ponder.

oOo

When he first began taunting her, it had cut her to the core; she had spoken to her mother many times about how to deal with it (and then McGonagall when the insults became more specific). It was in one of those conversations with Gryffindor’s head of house, that she came to understand the household and society Malfoy was being brought up in.

Since then she had learned to view his taunting and beliefs for what they truly were; misguided lies forced upon him by his family and cemented by pressure from his peers to remain in line with the same teachings being enforced in their own homes. Every insult he threw her way from then on was already forgiven, taken with a grain of salt. She couldn’t find it within herself to hate someone for lashing out when they had spent their life being beaten down by someone meant to protect them.

In the years that followed she saw the consequences of the beliefs he inherited and yet she did nothing, she had always felt guilty for remaining idle when he clearly needed help. By sixth year she could see the mental and physical toll and she realised that she was powerless to help directly, so she did all she could to end the war instead.

Despite everything he had put her and her friends through in their time at Hogwarts, without her notice, something more than pity had blossomed among her feelings for Malfoy.

He called himself a coward in his letter, but she knew better than to believe that. He was a boy in an impossible situation who had no hope in ever finding a way out. He preferred to face punishment or
death, rather than kill Dumbledore. He faced the same circumstance again by refusing to identify the trio at Malfoy manor. Far from the actions of a coward in her book; not to mention the courage it must have taken to come back to school or to write her in the first place.

She may not have been able to help before. But perhaps this could be a chance at making up for it.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

I had no idea where this fic was taking me, but after writing this chapter i think i have a half formed plan

- while the plot will focus on these two coming together:
I'm noticing that my characterisation of pre-redeemed Draco is already relying heavily on him dealing with his issues in a healthy manner. It may seem out of character for him to change his views so quickly, but as I will go on to explain; he had doubts about what he was being taught from a young age. All he needed was the absence of influence to fully realise it.

Hermione on the other hand is far more hesitant to open up about her experiences and feelings and this will be something I would like to see her work on over the course of this fic with Draco's help.

Chapter Notes

so lets have a look at what Draco has been up to since the war ended. hopefully this will fill in a few gaps.

hope you like it :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Every morning seemed to start the same way for Draco, it was like that muggle movie ‘Groundhog Day’ he had seen with Blaise and Theo the week after his trial ended. (They had insisted on taking him to a cinema in the heart of muggle London, for what they termed ‘escapism’).

First, He would wake in a cold sweat, the horrors of the war still dancing about in his mind, images remained long after his dreams had faded, waiting for him every time he blinked. After adjusting to the reality of consciousness, he would look down at the brand on his forearm to reassure himself it hadn’t stirred while he was unawares. He had never wanted it.

He had read tome after tome, never finding a solution to remove the twisted skull and snake from his flesh. It remained his greatest source of shame, the sight of it never failing to cause bile to rise and burn in the back of his throat.

It hadn’t taken long to realise the beliefs he had held were not ones he would have chosen for himself. After lengthy introspection alone, in a ministry cell, awaiting his trial before the Wizengamot: he concluded that if he had been in any environment but the one he was raised in, he may never have made the choices he did. In that time, he decided he would never forgive being led so far astray by his father, nor would he forgive himself for being so easily led.
With little fight left in him, he allowed guilt to darken his mind. The only person to understand what he was going through was his mother. They had always been close. In the time after their acquittals, even more so; often sitting for hours in the manor’s sun room, discussing how things might have been over tea.

It was during one of those discussions his mother told him stories of his childhood. Tales of a kind hearted little boy, kept alive in Narcissa’s memories… A boy who couldn’t find it within himself to kill a spider, who didn’t complain or lash out when older children would tease him for being small, a boy who snuck into the kitchens to help the house elves, rather than stealing morsels. This boy was far removed from the man he had become; he had grown into the prime example of his family’s outdated, bigoted values. But now that he could be his own man; his father and the other death eaters safely locked away in Azkaban (or dead); perhaps he could rediscover the qualities and values of boyhood he had been taught to disregard as weakness.

Most days he could find the strength to get up and go about his day, others not so much. When his mother had realised how reclusive and unhealthy his behavior had become (she had been particularly concerned by his frequent raiding of the liquor cabinet), she had insisted he go see a healer. He didn’t have it in him to resist or argue; so he went, and he talked, he came out feeling somewhat lighter and he decided to keep attending.

Every week he would return home with new tools to overcome the side effects of things he had witnessed, been subjected to and done during the war. As he progressed, Healer Nowak (a muggle-born who decided wizards needed psychologists too and opened his own practice) would not only give him advice, but would set him goals to work towards, with a focus on learning to cope with re-entering a society which saw him as unworthy of a chance at redemption (Draco didn’t believe he was worth the chance either, but he wanted to try).

after a particularly bad week about a month after first meeting Nowak, Draco decided to ask if there was anything he might relate his situation to from the muggle world, finding nothing in wizarding literature. Healer Nowak answered by telling Draco the story of his grandfather: a Polish man living in Warsaw during World War Two.

It had been fortunate his appointment was the last of the day; they ran two hours overtime as Draco came to understand the horrors muggles managed to inflict on each other without magic.

The next day he ventured into muggle London and bought books on the atrocities committed in Nazi Concentration camps, wanting to find out more. He left the bookstore that day with three books: the first, a book on a place called Auschwitz, the second on Adolf Hitler and lastly a book recounting the Warsaw Uprising.

Draco stayed up all night reading. He started with the book on concentration camps. He cried seeing photos of people forced to endure the horror of such a place. He wept while reading the testimonies of survivors.

The book on Adolf Hitler had left him with the perfect example of a muggle with the same brand of madness as Voldemort. He felt sickened by the comparison; if Voldemort was Hitler, he was essentially a deluded magical Nazi.

After the first two texts, he was dreading reading the last book. But he was glad he had persevered. Even though he read that the uprising had inevitably failed, it was a testament to the strength of the people, their patriotism and their undying hope. It amazed him to see how Warsaw was rebuilt in the aftermath of V-day, it gave him hope for the wizarding world to recover too.
Never in a million years did he expect to receive a letter from Hogwarts inviting him to return, he had been sure he hallucinated the owl. Though he quickly decided to turn it down, not wanting to face the people who had won the war but lost even more because of people like him.

Once again, his mother intervened. The following morning she dragged him to a meeting with Headmistress McGonagall and he was told that returning to Hogwarts would give him the best opportunity to prove to himself and his peers that he had truly set aside his prejudices.

He had been surprised to hear that McGonagall had been speaking with his mother at length regarding his progress and recovery. He was even more shocked to learn that the new Headmistress was not only willing to allow him to return, but expected him to take up the responsibilities of Head Boy.

He had argued with the Headmistress that he was far from deserving of the position, that no one would ever respect someone who hadn’t earned it, much less a Slytherin and a death eater.

She had let him say his piece and when he finished, she crossed the room to stare him down. Her hard stare had always frightened him as a boy (it wasn’t something you wanted to be on the receiving end of), he knew that his supposed logic was about to be crushed, so he braced himself for her rebuttal.

“Mr. Malfoy, how did you rank in each of your classes in your previous years at Hogwarts?”

‘Here we go’ he thought, resisting the urge to roll his eyes at what was common knowledge.

“Second in all subjects, except potions.”

“Yes, you were first in potions” Narcissa interjected.

McGonagall nodded at his mother and continued in a calm, even tone:

“So, you have always been an intelligent student…”

“…What about your role as a seeker? Did that require any leadership on your part?”

“I suppose it did, Headmistress.”

“What about your selection as a prefect? You apparently abused your powers and shirked your responsibilities in sixth year, for reasons we will not go into… but you were selected for the position nonetheless?”

He nodded and swallowed down the rising emotions that surfaced with the mention of sixth year.

“Does it not stand to reason that you have been preparing for the position of Head Boy since your arrival? Considering the varying leadership roles you have been placed in?”

Speechless, he simply nodded again.

“In the months after the war have you not come to realise the error of your beliefs and choices? Are you not attempting to make amends for your past mistakes?”

“I have been trying, Headmistress”

“Well then don’t you think that undertaking this responsibility would be a natural step in earning
She had him there. But he was still hesitant.

“Headmistress, I don’t think many will see my appointment in such a positive way.”

“They may not Mr. Malfoy, but perhaps they can be given an opportunity to let go of their own misconceptions, being allowed to witness someone such as yourself, rise from the ashes of the war, a better man than you were before.”

It was decided, her logic was irrefutable. He would be returning to Hogwarts to complete his education, and he would be taking up the mantle of Head Boy. It didn’t mean he wouldn’t face ridicule and hatred, but McGonagall was right; he needed this to show his schoolmates that he had found a better path and that he deserved his freedom.

After accepting the Headmistress’s offer, she dismissed them. He took his mother’s arm and headed for the fireplace. Grabbing the floo powder he was about to throw it when McGonagall called across the office:

“You and Miss Granger will make a fine team.”

Her statement followed the two Malfoys through the flames, all the way to Malfoy Manor.

oOo

His mother hugged him briefly after stepping out of the fireplace and made her way towards her chambers. Draco headed for the library rather than his room; McGonagall’s final words still ringing in his ears.

Hermione Granger would be his counterpart this year. Which would mean living together, constant contact... fuck!

Not that he minded her, he had secretly admired her for years; warring with himself over how someone so talented and pure of heart was to be hated because she was muggle-born.

It had never really sat well with him, but he had wanted to make his father proud, he had wanted to fit in. Young and foolish, he made taunting her his project, and now it was another sin (on a very long list) that he would never absolve himself of.

Anxiety wrapped around his lungs, the sensation reminding him of a boa constrictor, slowly killing its prey (a snake killed by a snake, how apt). He forced himself to steady his breathing as his mind drifted to all he had put her through.

The taunting, teasing and bullying…

Calling her Mudblood (Merlin he called her that so many times, called her much worse) …

Salazar help him; She had been tortured on the floor of his bloody home, While he stood by and did nothing!.

He knew she still bore the scars (the antithesis of his own in every sense).

Her scars went beyond a slur carved into her once perfect skin; She had endured them and could be proud of herself for remaining strong under torture.

His brand was something that he was supposed to have taken pride in, a show of his belief in a purist
madman. Those who had not followed the same beliefs were supposed to be blood traitors, his mark cemented his position as a staunch supporter of pureblood ideals. But after the war all the mark came to represent was his betrayal of wizarding kind.

There would never be a bigger challenge set before him than this. He could never expect her to… to what? Forgive him?

Did she know that he planned on returning? Had anyone told her?

A sneaking sense of dread at the prospect of running into her on the train and being hexed into oblivion told him it was likely she had not been informed. In his mind there was only one way to go about it. So he sat down among the shelves and prepared to write.

It took an hour before he even dipped his quill. Two hours and the floor was littered with crumpled drafts. Three hours and he was back to staring at blank parchment. Four hours and he decided to just write whatever came to mind; having recalled the advice of Healer Nowak, to be honest with himself and others if he wished to seek and gain understanding. Weary and emotionally spent he sealed his final attempt and called for his owl, opening the window as he did.

Draco conjured a treat and when Bubo landed on the back of the now unoccupied chair, he fed him and gently scratched his feathery cheek; attaching the letter with instructions to take special care delivering it.

Watching Bubo disappear into the inky skies of the Wiltshire countryside triggered another wave of anxiety at the thought of being unable to gauge her reaction, after all he had stupidly written he didn’t expect a reply.

It seemed he would have to wait until the start of term to find out.

Chapter End Notes

please feel free to leave feedback, comments and kudos - each one is a pepper-up potion for my soul

also feel free to say hi over on tumblr @emilythenotsosrange
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

looks like i managed to get another chapter written, I'll post em as quick as i write them :) - Sticking with Draco’s POV for the moment, but it'll be Hermione's turn next (yay)

I'm trying my hardest to make this something fun to read with a focus on getting to the romance part of it (I am not what people would call naturally funny, but a girl can try); while also dealing with some heavier emotions and showing different coping mechanisms. I know it likely seems a little out of character but i guess i want to inject a little hope into this lil post war fic

or perhaps I'm just subconsciously trying to fend off the seasonal depression and cheer myself up :)

Chapter Notes

Hope you all like the new chapter, its a little more lighthearted than I intended, but I wanted to set up the silver trio dynamic and get their lil butts to Hogwarts in one go :) choo choo, Hogwarts here we come...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

“Where is she?”

Muttering to himself, Draco scanned the small crowd on the platform for the fifth time, trying to spot Granger’s unmistakable nest of hair. When he was sure she wasn’t present, he made his way onto the train; sweeping his gaze through compartment after compartment only to come up empty.

He had hoped to find her and at least say hello, maybe apologise for being so candid in his letter if need be (though he would have to ask if she had read it in the first place, she might have just incinerated it on sight). For Circe’s sake they would be practically living together for the year, He didn’t want to get off on the wrong foot.

Eventually he gave up and went to find Theo and Blaise; not wanting to sit in the prefect’s carriage and deal with the inevitable stares, he’d had enough of those for today.

Having found common ground after the war they had grown close despite their penchant for arrogance. The two Slytherins weren’t hard to locate; arguing loudly about how best to annoy Pansy this year, when Draco fell into the spare seat rather ungracefully.

“Oi it's Draco! mate; I’m surprised to see you flop into a seat like a dead fish… did someone finally pull that stick out of your arse?”
Blaise snorted and shook his head, as if to say ‘I’m not getting involved here’.

Draco was about to spit back a retort and put Theo in his place but decided his fellow Slytherin deserved to sweat a little.

Draco glowered over at him as venomously as he could while trying to hold back his laughter; but Theo was onto him (so was Blaise) and the trio burst out into a fit of raucous laughter.

“Ugh, I missed you two prats…”

Draco managed to wheeze out his greeting between what he would never admit were giggles.

When they finally managed to calm down, they went through the usual small talk. In previous years it had been unpleasant to catch up; for reasons too numerous to bother listing (but mostly to do with their fathers, pressure to take the mark… then, actually taking the dark mark in Draco’s case).

Sure, it still got a little depressing when they would get onto the subject of therapy (Blaise and Theo both seeing counselors after taking Draco’s advice), but they were lucky to be able to speak freely at all. With no pressure to fit the mold set by their families and Voldemort; the trio worked together to reclaim some of their joy; finding every opportunity to laugh as loud as they could, hoping to chase away the demons threatening to engulf them.

When they were together it became somewhat of a competition to see who could be the least proper; who could swear the most, drink the most, shout the loudest, be the most immature. It was their own brand of rebellion and the three men relished in the time they were able to spend forgetting they were still meant to be boys (though sometimes they would try too hard, push a little too far, and things would fall apart, leaving a bitter taste in all their mouths).

oOo

“Hey Blaise, any news on a Slytherin quidditch comeback this year?”

Draco asked.

“I dunno, isn’t it all about inter house unity at the moment?”

“Yeah, I guess… I mean I ought to know, but its quidditch! They can’t just cancel it.”

“You’ve got me there; maybe the ‘Head boy’ should talk to McGonagall about it” Blaise teased.

“Aw leave him be Zabini…” Theo interjected

“…You’re just jealous you won’t be bunking with Golden Girl Granger this year!”

“You bet your arse I’m jealous! Merlin, have you seen her lately? I ran into her in Flourish & Blotts a while back, nearly died and went to heaven.”

“C’mon Drake, you have to agree, she’s absolutely fit!”

“I dunno, I’ve never really looked that closely at her… and what the fuck were you doing in a bookshop in the first place?”

“Well that was a surprisingly easy lie to tell’ Draco thought.

Blaise was realizing what Draco had known for years. Though Draco had spent a long time in denial and Blaise was still trying to work through the last of his pureblood values, it made no never mind now.
If he had to pinpoint when it happened, he would say the year of the Yule Ball had been eye opening. Seeing Granger in her elegant blue dress robes, had left Draco feeling like he had been hit by the Knight bus, going full speed ahead.

Snapping back to reality, he shook the image of her from his mind and re-entered the conversation at what was the most unfortunate of moments.

“Yeah alright, I’ll concede she has a phenomenal backside but honestly I’ve always been more of a tits man myself…”

“Merlin’s beard, Theo! Too much information, have a little respect won’t you?”

As soon as the words left his mouth, Draco wanted to find a small hole to crawl into and never come out. When Theo and Blaise nattered about girls, they were like erumpents (erumpenii? no.) in mating season. Naturally they never meant much by it. It was just talk and they usually kept it PG (as the muggles would say).

Draco interrupting to suggest they have a little more ‘respect’ would only serve to draw interest as to why Draco believed she was above the rest of the girls they talked about. Merlin’s Beard he was certainly in for it now.

The conversation halted abruptly and Draco’s entire being winced, expecting a barrage of questions and taunting. But it never came. They simply shot him twin questioning glares and dropped the topic; deciding to talk about the first trip to Hogsmeade instead.

Theo eventually began rummaging around in his bag, pulling out his latest muggle technological discovery: A Game Boy Colour. How he managed to sit for hours fiddling with this thing baffled Draco and Blaise, but after giving some ‘Pokémon’ game a try they came to understand. Blaise sought entertainment in the form of a charmed pocket radio and headphones. The group settling into companionable silence.

Draco still preferred a good book and cast a wandless accio; summoning the latest muggle book he had been reading (The World as I See It by Albert Einstein). He settled deeper into his seat and let his mind wander, only half paying attention to the page he was on.

oOo

In hindsight, It hadn’t taken long at all for the three of them to embrace more of the muggle world once they decided to let their antiquated ways of thinking go. Theo had called it ‘the most epic of Fuck You’s’ to the way they had been brought up.

Learning more about the muggle world had almost been a necessity in the wake of the Wizengamot trials. Being on the wrong side of the war, they had each needed an escape from the wizarding world (they weren’t really welcome most places they went), so they ventured outside their comfort zones and found they rather liked what the muggle world had to offer. A place where their reputations didn’t precede them.

Movies had been a wonderful discovery and the trio would often make plans to sneak out and leave reality for a few hours. They made a point of never seeing horror movies though: They’d all heard enough screaming and had enough of real horror to last ten lifetimes (after seeing a special screening of Nightmare on Elm Street they agreed they didn’t need Freddy Kruger and Voldemort Haunting their dreams).

Draco shivered a little at the thought of his dreams. Lately they had been far more disturbing if that was possible.
The same night he sent the letter to Granger (and every night since) he had begun dreaming of her torture at the hands of his Aunt. He had spoken to Healer Nowak about it, they had reached the conclusion that his subconscious was simply attempting to process the guilt and trauma surrounding the memory of her torture.

Basically his mind was attempting to cope with the prospect of seeing her again in the flesh. Regardless it had left his stock of dreamless sleep potion exhausted, with no time to brew more before leaving for the start of term.

Lost in thought and then lost in his book, time had passed much faster than Draco realised. He hadn’t even noticed the trolley come by; though the wrappers and crumbs littering the seat and the two sleeping gits across from him was evidence enough. He wished he had a camera to capture Theo slumped against Blaise’s shoulder, drooling on his shirt a little. They’d never live it down.

A little while later the train pulled into the station and the trio exited onto the platform, now dressed in their robes. Draco had loosened his tie, feeling uncomfortable and a little constricted being among so many people with even more negative opinions and assumptions about him. The journey up to the castle seemed to drag on, but seeing Hogwarts restored to its former glory, lit up like a beacon leading its students home was comforting in a way Draco didn’t expect.

The feast was, as always excellent; but sitting with the few Slytherins returning this year was awkward to say the least. The sorting ceremony was conducted with the usual efficiency, bolstering the ranks of each house and the Headmistress’ speech was succinct and a good attempt at inspiring hard work and unity among the cohort. He was still glad when it was over.

Tired and feeling a little more emotional than he cared to admit remembering how the castle had looked during the final battle, he made his way to his new dorm (having already delegated most of the evenings tasks to this year’s prefects).

He had almost forgotten how many bloody stairs there were. Reaching the Portrait of the Knight and stallion he spoke the password before he was trapped outside in a vicious cycle of idle chit chat.

It swung open and he stepped into a tidy though clearly already inhabited space. He didn’t care to note the theme of the room, instead his eyes were drawn towards the Books strewn across one side of the study area, a steaming mug of tea left on the kitchen counter, pillows and a blanket on the chaise. It was endearing seeing her influence about the room. He very quickly realised the reason he hadn’t glimpsed her all evening was that she had been working on rostering the Head and Prefects duties (her parchment stretched across the small coffee table held down by her inkpot).

But where was the ever-elusive Head Girl?

He headed past the kitchenette and instinctively walked down the opposite hallway; reaching the room at the end, he was met by familiar green and silver accents (well she definitely wouldn’t be in here). He changed out of his robes, quickly finding the exceedingly comfortable muggle pyjamas in his trunk and headed back to the common room. Still no sign of Granger.

Draco moved her pillow onto one of the armchairs and stretched out on the chaise, facing the portrait hole (trying not to look like he was waiting for her). He stared into the lit fireplace until he heard the telltale creak of the portrait opening.

Hermione was halfway over the threshold when she spotted Draco on the lounge. Shocked by the Head Boy’s sudden presence, she proceeded to trip through the portrait and land flat on her face,
swearing loudly on the way down. Her belongings skittered along the uncovered flagstones.

He was stunned and amused and worried but before his rational side could reboot he blurted out five words he knew he was going to wish he could take back once she picked herself up of the floor.

“Falling for me already Granger?”

‘Why the fuck did I say that!?’

oOo

Chapter End Notes

so that was a little out of character for Draco huh ? :) having tripped over in front of a guy I liked once (i spilled coffee everywhere), I figured why not embarrass the hell out of these two and have Draco say something stupid right off the bat :) 

feel free to drop me a comment or leave some feedback :) kudos also give me life or come say hi on tumblr @emilythenotsosstrange

till next time

xo Em
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

first up : chapter warnings - mentions of blood and mentions of harsh corporal punishment inflicted on a child (i don't want to not put a warning up just in case. a stitch in time saves nine)

so two chapters posted in one night - that's like a first for me haha

this story just wont leave me alone, but I'm really liking where its going so far

Chapter Notes

very dialogue heavy chapter, a little longer than the last few.

starts off a little strangely, but i wanted to show them attempting to make nice with each other and fail. also i feel that Hermione being surprised by Draco helping fix her up would be a natural reaction when she has had no contact with him (aside from his letter) since his trial. she has no idea what to expect so she is winging it.

i was chatting to my mum about how these two are interacting and i realised that it may seem out of character for them to open up but they are only doing so because they are both in need of someone to talk to.

Right now Draco needs to get some things off his chest and Hermione needs to hear them - ill do one more chapter on his thoughts going through explaining his redemption and then ill move this plot along :)

anyways, more to come... but for now enjoy :)
It was so unlike him (the night was still young and Hermione had no idea how unlike himself he truly was). First the letter, and now attempts at humor; there had to be Polyjuice involved here. She would have to remember to berate him for it later.

She laughed and winced all at once which made her nose bleed a little more.

The second thing to register was embarrassment. Her cheeks turned red as Godric’s socks and she tried to control herself enough to assess the damage.

She had definitely broken her nose and who knew what else she had injured making such a grand entrance.

She hadn’t noticed Malfoy had left the room until he appeared in front of her; wand in one hand, ice wrapped in a fresh tea towel in the other.

“Alright Granger this might hurt a little…”

“…Episkey!”

“Merlin’s saggy tits, THAT HURTS!!!”

Somehow the swearing helped. Hermione’s eyes watered and she resisted the urge to slap the spellcaster (even if it wasn’t Malfoy she still would have considered it).

At least the jolt of pain cleared the remaining wooziness. Her brain finally working properly, she looked down at a smiling Malfoy, crouching in front of her chair holding out the ice.

“You ok there Granger?”

“What do you find this funny Malfoy?” She bit out as she took the ice and pressed it to her face with a hiss.

He tried not to smile wider and she saw him hold his breath in an attempt not to laugh.

“Um, no *snort*… it’s not funny, it’s just… hm”

“I’ve just… neverheardyouswearbefore…”

Clearly unable to hold back anymore, he laughed in earnest, all the while trying to reign himself in.

She wasn’t sure why, but his laughter triggered a warm feeling in her chest, and she realised he was trying to make her feel better and she smiled back just a little.

It was all so very out of character; she had been expecting cold, indifferent behavior with a side helping of his usual arrogance.

But this behavior was new, strange, and beyond what she could have expected from him (even after reading that letter). She dared to peek down at him and found he was studying her too, those expressive grey eyes catching and holding hers before flitting away.

“Right, now that your nose is fixed, anything else feel broken? You hit the floor fairly hard.”

Thank goodness he had broken the increasingly tense silence. Hermione continued to wait for the old Draco Malfoy to make his appearance despite the concerned tone of his voice.

“No, nothing’s broken but I’ll be sure to have a few lovely bruises.”
“Wait here a moment, I might have something for that…”

He stood, turned on his heel and disappeared down his hallway. A minute later he returned with a small tub of salve and held it out to her.

She opened it and was greeted by the faint scent of cloves and Arnica. She rolled up the legs of her pyjamas and began applying it to her knees and shins, then her wrists and palms and finally a little around her eyes (a broken nose was sure to herald raccoon eyes). It tingled a little when she first applied it but the offending area was already feeling much less painful.

She wondered how she had never known about this before (considering what a covert klutz she could be). Still no sign of Old Malfoy, she remained wary but decided to play nice.

“Hey Malfoy, where did you buy this stuff? It’s awfully good.”

His cheeks pinked a little before he answered.

“I didn’t buy it, I made it. Figured out the recipe in third year after a few particularly rough, um... games of quidditch.”

His expression darkened for a moment before he caught himself and schooled his features, thinking she hadn’t noticed. Hermione had to wonder if he had created it for bruises caused by other means.

His posture stiffened a little, and he sat down in the armchair across from her.

“Well it’s brilliant! thank you for letting me use it.”

“Uh, it was no trouble. If you like I’d be happy to show you how to make it?”

Did he sound… hopeful?

“Sure Malfoy, I’d appreciate that…”

She could feel he was building up to saying something. He was looking tenser by the second and their awkward back and forth was no longer serving its purpose in distracting the two of them from the reality of their shared past.

She shifted nervously in her seat and as if on que:

“Did you read my letter?”

There it was.

“I did.”

Merlin she was bad at this, he wanted to talk, and she was giving him nothing to work with! But what was there to say… Yes, I read your letter… Was I surprised? Of course; Do I think this might be an elaborate prank designed to hurt me? Maybe.

She quickly thought of something more to say:

“To say I was surprised by it would be an understatement, I’m also still a little confused by it; but if
you want to explain further, whenever you’re ready; I’m willing to listen.”

‘Much better, a very diplomatic response’ She thought proudly.

Malfoy eased up a little then and something in her mind clicked, all the evidence fell into place. Merlin’s beard! He had been worried she wouldn’t want to hear him out. It made so much sense now: The letter, the warning he was returning. He wanted to make sure she wasn’t unprepared, he had wanted to be sure she was ok with him being around, he was being thoughtful. Anyone else and she would have accepted those actions for what they were, but her view of Malfoy led her to see the worst in him, when he was trying to explain that he had changed.

Godric help her, she needed to salvage this quickly if they had any hope of working things out. Her father had always said ‘the fastest way to break ice was with humor’.

“Oh and Malfoy, so you know, I’m not the kind of girl to fall for the first person I see”

She smiled tentatively at him, hoping to convey that she was teasing him (even if it was a lame attempt).

However, he clearly picked up on what she was doing and relaxed a little more; his serious expression tinged with the hint of a smile.

“I’m sorry if that remark was out of line, I didn’t think you’d hurt yourself as badly as you did.”

“That’s ok Malfoy, at least you didn’t ask if it hurt when I fell from heaven.”

“Why would I ask that?”

“Oh, it’s a muggle pickup line and a very cheesy one at that”

He chuckled lightly.

“Huh, that’s so terrible even I can see why it’s funny. Surely women don’t fall for lines like that?”

Strange that he didn’t try to claim his line wasn’t flirting.

“Good gracious, a Malfoy with a cheesy sense of humor… who’d have guessed.” Hermione mock fanned herself for effect.

“I happen to like cheesy humor…”

“…I’ll tell you a secret Malfoy…” she leaned toward him and he mirrored her.

“…I like cheesy humor too.”

Hermione watched him laugh with her. She had never seen the Slytherin like this. He still tried to hold himself back, she could see the process he took to allow himself a moment of happiness. It was equal parts sweet and sad that he was questioning whether it was ok to be happy in front of another person.

“Huh, never thought I’d see a death eater laughing.”

oOo

She clapped a hand over her mouth, realizing she had blurted out what she had been thinking, her eyes were wide and apologetic. Her outburst of dark humor was said the same way one might rip off
a band-aid. Except Malfoy didn’t flinch. He didn’t even look mad about it… he looked curious for a moment and just laughed harder.

That’s one way to break the ice. It was as though he just decided he’d had enough of being nervous, enough of trying to hide what she knew he was, enough of dancing around what he had to say.

He rolled up his sleeves and sat back in his chair. She made sure she didn’t visibly balk at the sight of his Dark Mark and she responded in kind by rolling her own up, bearing her forearms. Her scar was still raised and pink, stood out against the white of her skin.

It seemed he was full of surprises; rather than avoiding looking at her scar, he moved his chair closer, reached over and compared their opposing marks when she offered her own arm in response.

eventually dropping his arm, he met her eyes; asking silent permission (which she granted) to looked closer at the damage done to her by his own blood.

“What a pair we make…”

She could see he was trying to keep with their previous humor, but his expression remained solemn.

“I should have stopped this…”

“You couldn’t have done any more than you already had”

“Doesn’t matter, I should have tried; I should have avada’d her and been done with it.

“And you’d be cold in your grave if you had. There was nothing anyone could have done.”

“It would have been the right thing to do”

“Malfoy, do you mind if I ask why you’re telling me this, why you care? I mean, I understand the end of the war changed a lot of people… But you hated me and my muddy blood for years. How did you get to this point?”

“You don’t have to tell me now, I know its late and if you aren’t ready I don’t want to push. I just figure the sooner we get past this the easier working together will be. I want to give you that second chance you mentioned, everyone deserves one, even you.”

He took a deep breath and brought his eyes up to meet hers.

“It’s a long story but you deserve the long version; more than anyone. As for it being late, I don’t sleep much these days anyway.”

She smiled knowingly and nodded for him to continue.

“Essentially it started during my month in Azkaban, there was little else to do but think.”

“Voldemort was dead, I knew my father had been imprisoned with no chance of release and I realised that I had never had the chance to decide my beliefs and values for myself. So, I thought about all the Muggle-born witches and wizards I knew… They were all witches and wizards; blood status never needed to come into the equation. Magic isn’t about what you deserve or who your parents are; it is a gift, nothing more.”

She hadn’t expected him to be so precise in his explanation, there was no need to ask questions, he clearly had every intention of telling her everything. She just had to sit back and listen.
“What you have to understand is; my whole life I was told to believe that families like mine were above Muggle-borns because our bloodline was pure; I stopped challenging that when I realised what the punishment was. But when I saw the bloodshed in the final battle: pure or not, I couldn’t tell any of it apart.”

“It wasn’t hard to figure out I had been fed lies by madmen who thought they were saving our kind while destroying it. Those lies simply went down easier because I admired those men, like I admired my father.”

“The day you spoke at my trial was the day I knew those views were wrong. I never hated you, I kept telling myself I did… for years, because it was what was expected of me by everyone I knew. Its no excuse for my behavior but I lashed out the only way I knew how.”

“You know, there was one time I mentioned to my mother in a letter that I respected your intelligence and abilities, I met the end of my father’s belt the same night, he apparated to Hogwarts for the sole purpose of knocking ‘sense’ into me; and that hadn’t been the first time either.”

“Now, I didn’t tell you that for sympathy, I just want you to understand that it was easy for me to decide to part with what I had been taught, when I realised it wasn’t something I would have chosen to learn.”

Hermione had always suspected Lucius Malfoy used corporal punishment, more so after she met him in second year. Having it confirmed caused bile to rise in her throat. She felt as though she ought to comfort him somehow.

“You take one teaspoon of honey in your tea, yes?”

“Um, yes... good memory there Granger.”

“Well, I’ll make us some tea then. You feel free to keep talking while I go about it”

She stood, walked to the kitchenette and set about making a pot of chamomile tea. She knew he preferred chamomile with a teaspoon of honey from third year: most of the Slytherin and Gryffindor players caught chills after playing in bad weather; so She had gone to get Harry some from the kitchens and had stumbled across Malfoy doing the same (it was one of the few cordial conversations she’d had with him).

She caught him watching her movements, he looked away quickly and she went back to focusing on the tea.

It took him a moment; but he did continue.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

comments, kudos and feedback are always welcome :) I love hearing from you, so please feel free to drop me a line :)

or come check me out on tumblr: @emilythenotsostrange
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

ok couple of warnings for this chapter (better to be safe than sorry so please read)
mentions of suicidal thoughts, threat of rape, mentions of torture

I got this up a little later than I expected. I needed it to be just so and then I got lazy and
forgot to edit it but I've made it a little longer than the last few to make up for the delay

Chapter Notes

ok so we have Draco's POV here. Very dialogue based with a few thoughts thrown in. I
needed to get past this so I could move on with the plot, but it will not be the last time
they talk about
the war.
Next chapter will be Hermione having a little chat with Ginny trying to figure 'Draco
Darcy' out with ensuing hilarity.
the next two chapters will also see some short time jumps and progression of their
friendship (cue the studying tropes).
Enjoy lovelies :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

Draco found it strange that he wanted to continue (stranger still that she wanted to listen). talking to
her was cathartic, he was so used to keeping it all hidden behind a carefully constructed mask (one
that remained firmly in place during his sessions). It was nice to let someone see the broken soul
behind it. He wondered if maybe he would be in her life long enough for her to see him piece it back
together.

She was kind enough to listen and asked incredibly insightful questions, of course they were hard to
answer, but he loved that she asked them. They talked through most of the night and He hardly
noticed the time passing, or his tea cooling (sweet Merlin, she made perfect tea, even if he did forget
to finish it).

He had fully expected her to pity him (or worst-case scenario hate him). It wasn’t what he wanted to
inspire in her by talking about all this; true she had reacted to some of the more pathetic aspects of his
explanation (like the bit about his father) but she never made him feel that she believed he was
pathetic. He couldn’t bare seeing that in her eyes.

He hated reliving his memories of the war; but she deserved to have them, she deserved to
understand his motivation for his choice in side. He had done it all to save his mother, at the likely
cost of his own life. She had called him selfless, but all he saw was a coward who couldn’t stand up
for what he knew was right.
It had been simple to explain why he had teased her the way he did, easier still to explain how he was able to shed his prejudices so easily after the war. But explaining his actions after fifth year (despite the threat to his family) was far more visceral and emotionally raw material to cover.

They discussed Voldemort taking up residence in his home and the horrors that had followed in his wake. He thought she would have ran for the hills when he began discussing the torture sessions he had taken part in and witnessed, but she had stayed, and she cried with him.

He knew he was avoiding talking about his mission in sixth year; but when she had asked about it, he couldn’t help but bare the darkest part of himself to her. Deep down he wanted her to know.

He wondered briefly if telling her would be what managed to drive her away. He hoped she could take the weight of his burden.

“I should warn you, it won’t be pleasant to hear Hermione…”

He could feel the spike of anxiety twist in his gut, but when he looked at her she was resolved to hear him out, her features etched with kind concern. An expression he never would have expected to see aimed at him.

It comforted him to know she cared. That maybe she could see past the twisted thing that sat before her.

“I can handle it, I’d like to understand…”

“Oh, and Draco, it’s nice to finally hear you call me by my actual name.”

Sweet Merlin, he had never seen her smirk before, but it was such an attractive expression that he desperately wanted to see it on her features again (albeit it a far more lighthearted situation). He forced himself to concentrate on the task at hand, but he couldn’t help a small retort.

“I always rather liked your first name; Winter’s Tale is one of Shakespeare’s best works, its classic and it suits you; Hermione”

He saw her hide a shy smile behind her teacup at hearing him play with the way her name sounded. The blush spreading across her cheeks and down her neck was incredibly sweet… ‘Salazar help me, she’s so distracting… focus!’

“Erm...Sorry, I’m stalling, it’s a little difficult to relive this I guess.”

“That’s ok Draco, I understand.”

Hearing her testing his name in turn shattered his focus yet again, but he managed to reign himself in. He took a few deep breaths and as he spoke he tried not to relive it too much.

“The day I took the mark was the second worst day of my life. Voldemort had been ranting for days about some thing or other that had gone awry, my Aunt riled him up more and he reached breaking point. He wanted Dumbledore dead, but he had no way of doing it himself while the Headmaster remained at Hogwarts.

“Naturally none of the death eaters could get past the castle wards so he looked for someone he
could use on the inside…”

“My own father nominated me for the mission. He volunteered me to kill a man who didn’t deserve to die and to let death eaters into a place I had secretly considered a haven for years. He also volunteered me to endure taking the mark.”

“Voldemort had made it clear if I was to undertake his task I would be initiated into his ranks; I just didn’t know at the time how sick the initiation process was. A muggle-born woman had been brought in by the snatchers and I was ordered to extract information.”

“I almost refused, I didn’t want to torture anyone; but I saw Fenrir with his wand pointed at my mother and I knew I had to make a choice.

“I’m not proud of it but it was either watch my mother be stripped of her dignity and tortured, or just torture the stranger; that woman’s screams are just a little louder than the rest in my mind… At least Bella killed her quickly, that was merciful after what I did to her….”

“…I took the mark that afternoon. You should know, it’s no normal tattoo: it was branded onto my skin. I nearly passed out from the pain, I knew if I did I would put my family at risk for showing such weakness; so I kept it together and tried not to let it show.”

“It was worse than any crucio I’d been subjected to. When it was over everyone simply walked out and left me there. I could hear Aunt Bella laughing and I thought then that I was going to die. Next thing I know I’m in my own bed, my mother next to me; apparently I had a few seizures and she had used some potion or other to put me in a coma for a couple of days.”

“I got on the train that year feeling poisoned. I threw the weight of bearing the mark around to keep my lackeys in line, I did what was expected of me. As the year progressed that poison sank into my soul. I was trying to fix the vanishing cabinet in time, my mother’s letters were troubling to say the least and I knew they were hurting her each time I failed.”

“Then there was the inevitable fall out of my initial assassination attempts. The cursed mead wasn’t meant for Ron, and the necklace certainly wasn’t meant for Katie: add those to the list of things I’ll never manage to fully atone for.”

His tone turned bitter and he saw her wince as she remembered what happened to Katie and Ron. But she schooled her features and looked up at him with those amber eyes. Burning with questions, begging him for the answers his tale held. He didn’t stop, she didn’t interrupt, and he descended into his memories as he neared the end of this particular story.

“I mean I was sixteen and stupid, I tried to do it without getting my hands dirty, tried to be covert about it. But once the first two attempts failed I knew I was going to have to do it myself and that wasn’t something I was prepared for, I just didn’t have that in me.”

“The stress drove me mad; if I wasn’t trying to keep my mother safe, I think I would have ended it the day Potter found me in Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom. I’ll admit, for a moment I was glad he hit me with that Sectumsempra; I wanted to die, I was just too much of a coward to do it. When I woke up from that, I was surprised to say the least and Merlin the pain after was top five for sure. But I felt I deserved it.”

“I tried to delay as much as I could after that, but once again my hand was forced. I received a letter from my mother in Voldemort’s words. If I didn’t fix the vanishing cabinet I would be called home and executed alongside my parents.”
“So I fixed it and I went up to the tower, resolved to kill Dumbledore in my family’s stead... Not that I would have ever done it, I’d already lowered my wand, as Potter can attest to, but I came so close.”

“I never felt more alone or afraid. There are no words to describe to you how it felt being up there watching Dumbledore fall, knowing that while I may not have cast the curse, it happened anyway. Snape apparated me back to the manor and took me before Voldemort.”

“I think I transcended simple fear then, I can’t even remember what happened when I saw him that night. I blacked out and when I came to I was throwing up in a vase near my room. From what I heard, he praised my efforts and hit me with a few crucios for not doing it myself... honestly I think he was too elated Dumbledore was dead to care about who killed him that much.”

“I didn’t eat or sleep for months after that, I couldn’t close my eyes in case something happened while I was out of it. honestly I was relieved when the final battle came around. I was tired of playing the perfect pureblood, I was sick of pretending I wanted to be part of any of it, that the sight of the mark on my arm didn’t make me sick to my stomach... though that feeling never really went away.”

“I hoped I’d end up dead or in prison that day. I wanted to be free of it all. I still wake up most mornings and wonder if when I open my eyes I’ll be staring at a cell. But here I am, I’m alive and free and I’m able to tell you all this because you and your two insane friends decided to save me more than once.”

Draco broke down then; he had never admitted to anyone how he felt the night of Dumbledore’s death or the day of the final battle. It was something Healer Nowak knew not to bring up. But here he sat telling Hermione bloody Granger about it.

He didn’t want to be this vulnerable in front of her, she held the shreds of his reputation and his heart in her hands; he didn’t like the feeling of relying on someone to be kind with the power they wielded. So many who had held such power over him had only used it to cause pain.

Head in his hands and hot tears running down his face, he didn’t see her move to kneel in front of him. He flinched when she placed a warm hand on his knee, lifting his silvery grey eyes to meet her amber ones. He longed to lash out, to reclaim control like he used to, striking her down with his words (old habits do die hard). he managed to keep his mouth shut and she took one of his hands in hers.

She guided him down to her level and pulled him into a tight hug.

‘Definitely not how he was expecting this conversation to go.’ He thought

It took him a moment to unfreeze his muscles and when he did he returned her embrace with a fierceness he didn’t know he possessed. He knew it was platonic, but it was so charged with emotion that he knew she was as aware as he was that it was far more than what it seemed. It was something they both needed.

Hermione pulled away and stood with a yawn, he followed and set about collecting their mugs and placing them in the sink (too bloody late to deal with them now he supposed).

She broke the silence just as he was wondering if he should say something.

“So some way to spend the first night back, huh?”
“Sure if you like feeling depressed.”

He tried to sound nonchalant, but likely came off sarcastic. She chuckled despite him.

“You know Draco I’m really glad you told me all of that. I know it must have been difficult.”

“Actually compared to the other times I’ve had to talk about it, this was by far the most successful attempt.”

A half smile graced his features as he recalled the last time he had discussed this with Healer Nowak. To say it hadn’t gone well was an understatement, but at least now he could see the lighter side of it and he managed to convey that to Hermione through his expression.

She gave a small smile in return and looked down at her shoes to hide her slight blush (it was a nervous habit he had noticed she had developed back in fourth year).

“Well I’m still glad. Besides I think we’ve needed to clear the air for some time now, I’m happy we managed most of it in one go.”

“Well Granger I don’t think either of us want to spend longer than necessary talking about it and even this conversation has kept us up well past the witching hour.”

“That’s very true. You were right though… not that you’ll ever hear me say that again. If we wanted to function as a team in any capacity, let alone share a dorm, we had to get this over with. It’s better we didn’t dance around the issue.”

He let out a small, knowing laugh at her comment (imagining how awful it would have been if they hadn’t talked) and they quickly bid each other goodnight.

But once again his mouth betrayed his brain as he walked down the hall.

“You know, if you ever want to talk, or if you ever have questions, I’m here for you.”

She called back from her hallway in a much more certain tone than his.

“I might just take you up on that sometime … Night Draco.”

“Goodnight.”

Opening his door and settling in for the night, he realised (moments before the dreamless sleep potion took effect) that their earlier hug was the longest he could ever remember being touched.

He wondered what that might mean, but for now he could breathe a little easier and decided it wasn’t the time to ruminate on why he had felt so at home in her arms.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

feel free to leave a comment, some feedback or kudos. they give this writer life and inspiration to keep typing away.

or come say hi on tumblr @emilythenotsosstrange
I've got the next chapter half written so I expect I'll have it up midweek if work doesn't get in the way :)

till next time - Em
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

managed to get this one up fairly early whoo hoo! next one will be back to Draco's POV.

no warnings for this one. its a bit of a filler with some plot thrown in

Chapter Notes

hope you all enjoy the new chapter :) theres a couple of small time jumps and its been about a month since the letter.

-:*-

next chapter will have a few of Draco's thoughts on their awkward interactions, bit of silver trio and a response to Hermione's confessions.

enjoy, till next time
xo Em

oOo

Hermione woke the day after feeling worn and tired, she grabbed a pepper up potion and downed it quickly, trying to ignore its taste. Feeling somewhat refreshed she showered, dressed and after checking the time went to the kitchen to make breakfast. Only someone else had thought of it for her.

She had been certain Malfoy had already left, but she did a quick double check anyway. It seemed he had anticipated her sleeping in; there on the counter under a stasis charm he had left scrambled eggs on toast, and a cup of tea. The note beside it simply said: Enjoy.

She went about her day and her classes dragged on a little more than usual, but every time his considerate gesture crossed her mind she felt herself brighten just a little.

oOo

She didn’t see Draco around their dorms for a week (other than seeing him in classes or prefect’s meetings, he was nowhere to be found). She knew he was avoiding her, but it didn’t make her angry; she understood the toll their conversation must have taken. She had spent every night since processing everything they had discussed that first night.

It was strange the way they connected. Using dark humor to ease into discussing such horrible things. But then they weren’t exactly conventional people.

The ‘Golden Girl’ and the disgraced ‘Slytherin Prince’; what a pair indeed. She never would have thought they could manage to build a bridge (well the foundations of one at least). Still she felt the
weight of their conversation on her shoulders. He had willingly shown her the tattered soul hidden behind his façade and yet she had offered nothing of herself in return. But, he had accepted that and understood what he had to say would be hard for her to come to terms with.

She couldn’t get over the changes in him. She watched him in her periphery and saw a man who thought he was living on borrowed time. He didn’t seem to take a day for granted, he threw himself into his studies and quidditch. Naturally he was withdrawn among most students (they had their opinions, and some had enough gall to voice them) but with the younger students she saw that he clearly wanted to be an example of tolerance and ‘kindness unto others’ (kindness he had not been shown himself).

When they did finally end up in their common room at the same time, they had chatted politely. Both trying to mask the unease just below the surface. She wondered if he knew that her unease was for a completely different reason to his own.

She had so many questions for him since the term started; but she knew she needed to give him a few answers of her own (he deserved them just as much). The guilt of her past assumptions and inaction ate at her and she knew they would likely spend another dawn talking about things they would much rather keep to themselves. But how was she supposed to bring it up. He had made it clear he didn’t want her pity.

There was only one thing to do. Hermione needed to talk to Ginny.

The trek up to Gryffindor tower had always left the muscles in Hermione’s legs burning. It was a great work out; but she hardly noticed it in her excitement to meet Ginny.

There was a lot of catching up to do after a few busy weeks in the castle. While Hermione wasn’t usually one to gossip, she wanted to know what was going on outside her little bubble since returning to school. She was still avoiding talking to Ginny about Malfoy and by proxy was avoiding talking to him. Their interactions of late had been superficial, as though neither of them knew how to open-up to one another.

The portrait of the Fat Lady swung open and Ginny was practically bouncing with excitement, instantly crushing her in a warm hug.

“I missed you ‘Mione!!”

“It’s been like a day Gin, seriously? Ok, I missed you too, but. I. can’t. breathe!

“Oops, sorry…”

Ginny loosened up and tried to look sheepish but burst into giggles when Hermione returned her lung crushing embrace.

Linking arms, Ginny led her over to the couch in front of the fire and cast a quick silencing charm. Hermione didn’t even get a chance to ask what had been happening over the break before Ginny began her usual interrogation.

“So, how’s it going living with Malfoy?”

“Geez Gin, you really don’t pull punches do you?”
“Nope, never have… Now spill!”

Hermione almost laughed at the Cheshire Cat style grin Ginny was sporting as she waited for an answer.

“Gin, we cleared the air ages ago: Since then it’s been amicable, he’s been nothing but polite. We study together sometimes and occasionally there’s some small talk, but other than that he keeps to himself.”

“Uh huh… You sure that’s all?”

“Of course I’m sure, unless you’re talking about our duties as co-heads? Otherwise, what are you getting at Gin?”

“Well I think if you two have managed to make amends it’s an opportunity.”

Hermione shot a questioning glare at Ginny.

“‘Mione, how long have we been friends?”

“A long time Ginny, but please get to the point.”

“Oh Alright; Well I have eyes you know and any idiot that thought to look closely enough could figure out you’ve been holding a torch for Malfoy since before the war.”

Hermione choked on the breath she was attempting to take. But she made no attempt to deny Ginny’s nonchalant statement. There was far too much truth behind it and at least now she could talk to someone about it.

“Don’t worry ‘Mione, I’d never tell a soul; frankly I kinda see how it might work, and it helps he’s a little dreamy to boot… But you should know, I think he’s on the same broom.”

“W-what gives you that impression?”

“A-HA!!! You didn’t deny it, I bloody knew it!”

Ginny started bouncing in her seat and Hermione knew she meant no harm bringing this to her attention. It didn’t mean it made her feel comfortable talking about it at all.

“I mean I didn’t know for sure until you started the campaign for his release after the war; but it just made so much sense once school started back: You keep smiling and Merlin Hermione: It’s nice to see because Godric knows you haven’t had many reasons to lately…”

“Gin, I get how you figured it out… I thought I hid it well; but you’re you, so of course you saw through me. But what on earth makes you think he feels the same?”

“Well for one thing; whenever you’re around his eyes follow you. I’ve watched him try to stop himself, and a minute later he’s back to staring at you. Then there’s that letter you showed me from the start of term… Not to mention your first night, he’s put a lot of effort into proving he’s made changes”

“I know he has but that doesn’t prove anything, we can hardly say two words to each other.

“Ugh please, Hermione are you blind. He’s afraid you still hate him.”

“Oh…”
“Yeah ’Mione, ‘Oh’ is right. Think about it; he knows how horribly he’s treated you. Hell, he watched his Aunt torture you in his bloody house. He doesn’t know what to say, because you won’t say anything to put his mind at ease. Merlin I can’t believe I’m saying this; but you need to take a page out of his book and get your feelings out in the open.”

“Gin, its freaky how you can read my mind sometimes. You’re sure you’re not a legimens? I’ve been meaning to ask you how to go about dealing with that exact issue”

“Well you’re getting my advice now whether you like it or not… Besides, I’ve got a bet with Luna that says you two will be snogging before the year is out. She says earlier, but I’m betting on you being stubborn.

“But none of us will win if you don’t talk to him! That includes you!”

“Guess I got my advice then. Now that we’ve covered that, will you please tell me the latest news?”

oOo

Ginny caught her up on the happenings about the Burrow rather quickly. Things were going well for Bill and Fleur, Charlie was back in Romania and Harry was going from strength to strength in his auror training.

Hermione hadn’t been getting many letters since leaving the Burrow. Aside from the occasional update from Harry, she heard very little.

Especially after visiting the Burrow and finally explaining to Molly that she would not be her future-daughter-in-law; no matter how much she cried and begged Hermione to take Ron back.

Molly wasn’t ready to resume speaking to her just yet, though Ginny was slowly trying to bring her round; Molly’s dreams of planning the Granger/Weasley nuptials were in pieces and the work was slow going.

Besides, Ron had well and truly moved on from her (not that he had told his mother); With his old flame Lavender Brown no less. Sickening as it was to have ‘Won-Won and Lav back together again; She was glad he was happy.

When they ended things, Ginny had been so supportive and had given her some solid advice: She needed someone to challenge her… Ice to her fire. She knew in her heart Ginny was right. They had very few common interests and could rarely talk about anything aside from school, the war or quidditch. Ron would have spent his life trailing behind her ambitions and she didn’t want to destroy his happiness and earn his resentment all at once.

She needed an equal.

oOo

It was a few days after her chat with Ginny and She could feel her nerves twisting in the pit of her stomach; she was lying in wait for Draco to walk through the portrait after quidditch practice. (When did she start referring to him by his first name? certainly a new development)

The best line she had come up with to start the conversation so far was ‘can we talk’. The brightest witch of her age couldn’t even manage to start a serious conversation with someone. So, she decided on taking a different approach. Liquid courage.

She accio’d her bag (the one with the undetectable extension charm) and found a bottle of
firewhiskey she had smuggled in for emergencies.

Twenty minutes later the portrait swung open and she attempted to coolly ask if he wanted to join her for a drink.

“Uh, sure. What’s the occasion?”

“No occasion, just a long day.”

“Fair enough.”

“How was practice?”

“A little rough but otherwise fine, though I’m surprised you’d ask; I thought you hated quidditch?”

He smiled at her lack of coherent reply and she felt a little warmer as her blush spread across her chest. He sat across from her on the floor and leaned forward on the coffee table resting his cheek on his palm.

She poured two glasses and they sat quietly for a few moments sipping away. Eventually she worked up the courage to say what was on her mind. She didn’t bother to mince words:

“Do you think I hate you?”

He looked shocked for a moment, as though he couldn’t believe what he’d heard.

“I don’t know; do you hate me?”

She had to give him props for turning the question back onto her.

“No, I don’t. I never really did.”

She noticed he frowned a little at that, but he managed a reply well enough

“What do you mean?”

“I mean exactly that; I never hated you. Sure, I didn’t particularly like you and you did some pretty horrible things; but despite everything I always understood why you acted the way you did.”

“Alright, let me get this straight… You don’t hate me? Despite years of torment and my role in the war? You might need to elaborate a little: After I have another one of these, I think I’m going to need it.”

He reached for the bottle and poured them both another drink, almost laughing but not quite. He downed his quickly while she explained.

“You aren’t the only one who has regrets Draco. There’s things I should have done but didn’t have the courage to stand up and do them.”

He quirked an eyebrow at her and she took a breath before she let loose what she had held back for years.

“I should have helped you.”

Confusion and disbelief flashed across his features.
"I guessed what you were going through in first year, our first night back you confirmed it...I never did anything about it though. I should have said something, done anything. But I was a coward."

"By second year you started lashing out, you took it out on me; your taunts took a harsher turn and Merlin knows every time you called me mudblood I died a little inside: But McGonagall helped me see that it wasn’t entirely your fault and I still did nothing to help you.

"Third and fourth years passed and it got even worse, by then I couldn’t do anything. For a while I gave up. You looked so sick most of sixth year, I begged McGonagall to help you, but she told me there was nothing anyone could do until you chose it; I think she knew you had the mark by then."

"The day the snatchers caught us, I was praying there was still some light left in you. Not that I expected you to save us or anything; even though you tried. I just didn’t want to see your father staring down at me with your eyes."

He flinched, and she noted the pained expression on his face at the mention of her Easter spent in his home.

I didn’t see you again until the final battle, even then I wasn’t really looking too closely. The next time I saw you was at your trial.

"I asked them not to tell you once it was over; but I finally found a way to help. I knew you didn’t deserve the same fate as the other death eaters, besides you were underage when you were forced to take the mark. So, I campaigned while you were in Azkaban on your behalf."

He stared at the bottom of his empty glass, unable to meet her eye.

"So, I have you to thank for my freedom?"

"No, thank yourself; silly as that may sound. I wouldn’t have done it if I didn’t see something good in you."

"Did my mother know about it?"

"No, but I spoke for her as well; As did Harry."

"You made your apologies, but you didn’t know you had already been forgiven, I won’t lie and say it was easy for me to overcome the past, but I’d like to move forward. If the past month has been anything to go by, I was right to do so."

"Now I’m asking if you can forgive me. Not because I want you to, or you feel obligated to. I’d like to earn yours as you earned mine."

oOo
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

no warnings needed for this chapter, back with Draco’s POV

Chapter Notes

it took a little bit of fiddling to get this to a point i was happy with but i think the outcome was worth it. i wanted to show these two struggling with a bit of awkwardness and eventually finding a way to deal with their regrets and guilt. I'm so excited to write friendship fluff for a little while (i did say slow burn right?)

anyway, hope you like the new chapter
xo Em

Draco wasn’t usually the type to stand for awkward silences and small talk when there was more that needed to be said. But he knew better than to bring it up; He didn’t want to push her into discussions she couldn’t handle, he knew how awful that felt. However, it didn’t stop him wanting to have a conversation with a little more depth.

Eventually his mind turned against him. He began to believe her blatant avoidance was because she would never forgive him. So, he began avoiding her managing a week before he ran into her in their common room, not wanting to force her to pretend around him.

Though he had tried not to expect anything of her, he had hoped that their first proper conversation would not only bridge the divide between them; but would allow them to be open with each other going forwards.

But it seemed she would not be able to move past it and he would have been lying if he said it didn’t hurt. So, he built his walls a little higher and hid behind polite small talk and excuses.

The next time they spoke, he asked how her classes were going (it was a stupid question and he berated himself for it considering he was in every one of them), she had kept her answer short and returned his question. She would rarely initiate conversation, aside from discussing their duties or studies, but he took what he could get.

Every day he told himself he would stop trying and let it go. But his interest in her never waned. He took to watching her go about her day to day; it was fascinating observing her expressions and mannerisms.

From the way she crinkled her nose when she found something interesting (or vexing) to the reverent way she would open her textbooks; Even the little sparks of magic that would run through her hair when she was practicing spells.
There were so many little things that made up her personality, each of them endearing and he could scarcely tear his eyes away should he miss something new. He remained surprised he hadn’t been caught yet, but then again, she avoided him at every chance.

Still he refused to give up.

\[oOo\]

Blaise and Theo had noticed Draco’s behavior quickly enough and it hadn’t taken long for them to pull the truth of his feelings from him; All they had needed was a half decent bottle of firewhiskey (aka Draco’s veritaserum) and he was practically composing sonnets about her. Something he wouldn’t be living down any time soon.

The interrogation began once about half of the first bottle was gone and took the form of a very biased game of truth. Slytherins did know how to play an advantage after all.

“So, when did you start to like the little lioness?”

Blaise’s speech was slow but not quite slurred considering how much of the bottle he had downed, Draco wasn’t faring as well and was utterly trashed, having started on his own stash before arriving.

“S’pose I liked her the second she barged in asking about Longbottom’s toad on the train… but I didn’t really figure it out until she punched me in the face in third. After that good old Voldy got in the way.”

That remark left Blaise and Theo in stitches for a good five minutes before Blaise resumed his line of questioning.

“Mate, you realise that’s a little pathetic?”

“Yeah, I know. But that was the first time I really saw her up close!”

“Then there was the Yule Ball. Merlin’s beard, the way she looked that night… don’t even get me started; she practically stopped my heart beating.”

Blaise and Theo shared equally amused looks at how animated Draco was getting talking about her. Not that Draco noticed.

“But if you liked her why’d you tease her so much?”

“Fucked if I know Blaisey; pureblood ideals and all that. Not to mention I was jealous Pothead and Weasel got to be around her, even though they treated her like a walking encyclopedia.”

“I was I right git back then. To her face at least…”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“I mean flowery bullshit aside; I did put her on the path of the basilisk when all that Chamber of Secrets shite was going on. Not that she ever knew I did it”

Theo decided to add his two sickles then;

“Wait a sec, didn’t you try to slip a warning to her at the Quidditch World Cup that there was going to be an attack?”
“Yup. Told her to keep her head down or she might be attacked for being muggle-born... Didn’t put it so nicely at the time, but I wasn’t about to make it obvious I was trying to help.”

“lemme guess, you never thought to mention that to her over the past month or so?”

“No. but she hates me anyway, it’s not like s’gonna change anything.”

“You’re sure she hates you?”

“Why else would she avoid me Theo? She can hardly stand to be in my presence, let alone say more than two words to me outside of our roles as heads: And we live together! that’s no mean feat.”

“Drake, I don’t think she hates you, I reckon she’s just getting used to you. you can be a lot to take in sometimes.”

“I know, but its been a while already and I just don’t think she’ll ever come around.”

“Maybe not, but you can’t say you didn’t try.”

Blaise decided to re-enter the conversation then with his usual idea of humor.

“Ah fuck all that Drake; you two sound like a couple of bloody Hufflepuffs, or characters in a bad romance novel! Man up and ‘ave another drink.”

The trio burst out laughing again, once they had managed to stop their hysterics at his star-crossed situation, Theo managed to offer decent advice before changing the subject. (Blaise’s advice being the main reason.)

“Let her come to you on her own time.”

“Just don’t give up on her before she does.”

Blaise on the other hand suggested he fuck her and deal with the rest later. But that was never ever, ever, ever going to happen.

He had initially scoffed at Theo’s advice, but little did he know Theo was inevitably right.

oOo

Draco was still trying to take Theo’s advice from their drunken night spent talking about his unrequited feelings. He still observed Hermione from afar and went about his business.

Another tense week passed them by and he wondered if Theo had been wrong.

Quidditch was always a good outlet for him though. He relished in the rush and the freedom it provided. He spent as much time training out on the pitch as he did in the library studying; it was a good balance.

Whenever training happened to be washed out, he was always a little miffed (It’s Scotland for Salazar’s sake!). Lightning was the cause of this week’s disappointment. He had always found the thirty/thirty rule a little ridiculous, but then he saw the storm move in overhead and decided perhaps cancelling was the right decision.

Heading back to his dorm he could feel the chill setting in despite the hot shower. He’d be glad to get in front of the fire and warm up or maybe just fall into bed and stay under the covers for a while… ‘a nap wouldn’t go amiss these days’ he thought.
However, Fate had other plans. Sitting on the floor in front of the couch was his favourite bookworm.

“Hey Draco, you want a drink?”

Every word of her question stunned him. Firstly, she was speaking to him (he refrained from checking that fact considering she had addressed him directly). Secondly, she had called him by his first name which sounded heavenly in her voice despite having heard her say it before. Lastly, her tone was bright and kind, if a little nervous, which was a surprise in itself; considering her usual curt monotone.

He naturally accepted and sat down as gracefully as he could manage considering his post training aches and twinges. She had started their usual small talk, even going so far as to ask about quidditch (which he knew she hated). He remained polite and kept his curiosity under control as they drank and chatted.

Her next question almost went over his head. Merlin was he positively stupefied when he grasped what she was asking. (he wondered for a moment if she had been talking to Theo, but that would have been unlikely).

His brain managed to get his mouth to spit out a response and from then on, he sat and listened in awed silence.

Her confession didn’t invoke the emotions he would have expected. Her admissions actually gave him comfort. To think that all that time she had been his secret defender; he tried to reassure her that no one could have helped him with his father or the other death eaters, but she was adamant that she should have at least tried.

He wanted to be angry at her for pitying him, but once he looked past his pride he saw that it wasn’t pity or guilt that drove her to confess; it was that she cared. She cared enough to tell him that her greatest regret was not helping him sooner.

By the time she told him about her role in his trial he was holding back tears, praying that she wouldn’t see the effect her words caused.

She asked his forgiveness…There was never anything to forgive (and she never needed to apologise anyway). There was nothing she nor anyone else could have done. Yet she felt guilty for not doing more for him. She was either crazy or a saint (he preferred the latter). There was no pity, no sarcasm in her eyes or her words. She was finally putting letting him see her true self.

So, he absolved her, he expressed his forgiveness freely and somehow finally managed to solidify their friendship in the process.

Never in a million years did he ever think that day would have ended with the two of them sitting on the floor beside the fire, laughing over childhood antics. At some point she had moved to sit beside him and leaned against him as they continued to get to know one another.

He had never laughed harder in his life when she told him about the night she finished making her first Polyjuice potion.

“So, you’re telling me; you successfully brewed one of the most complex potions around, in second year, in Myrtle’s bathroom and then used it to moonlight as Crabbe and Goyle just to get intel from me… OH MY GOD THAT’S WHY GOYLE WAS WEARING GLASSES!!!!”
“Oh, sweet merlin! did he forget to take them off? Ugh, what a way to have been caught; Merlin knows those two can’t act, thank Godric you weren’t paying closer attention… I am sorry about the deception though, it was out of line.”

“Who cares if it was out of line? That kind of cunning is to be celebrated. You’d have made a great Slytherin. What I want to know is how you kept those two idiots out of the way!?”

“Oh; we put a sleeping draught in a couple of cakes. Knocked them right out while the boys gallivanted about the dungeons with you.”

“That was positively genius! No wonder you're the brightest witch of our age.”

“Hm, not always.”

She drew in a little but remained leaning against him. Her expression became more reserved at the mention of her title.

“What do you mean Hermione?”

“Well I don’t always have all the answers. I mean seeing as we’re talking about second year, I may as well admit that I wasn’t the one to figure out it was a basilisk on the loose.”

‘Is she a fucking seer?’ He wondered.

Either that or someone up there likes me. I never planned on telling her; hell, she might not even believe me, but I might as well, not like there’s anything to lose.’

“Yeah, I knew you didn’t figure that one out…”

He tried to sound jovial, but it was a thinly veiled attempt at masking his nerves regarding her possible reactions.

“how could you know? I’ve never told anyone that, not even Harry and Ron. But that would mean…”

She stopped short, so he finished for her;

“That would mean, I ripped the page out of a book and slipped it into your bag when you were more occupied fawning over Lockhart in that bookshop.”

“You ripped a page out of a book? Malfoy, how could you?”

She started laughing then so he played along, realizing she wasn’t angry about it.

“That’s all you took from that? I warn you about a massive fucking snake in the castle and you’re more worried I tore a page out of a book?”

She laughed harder for a moment before switching back to being serious. He tensed, waiting for what she had to say next.

“Why did you slip me that page? You called me mudblood for the first time that year, I cried for ages over that. Why did you want to help me?”

“I didn’t want you to get hurt. I might have said horrid things to you, hexed you once or twice… but I didn’t want you to die. I saw my chance to do the right thing and I took it. I knew father was going to give the Weasley girl that fucking diary, so I warned the one person smart enough to understand
what I had given her once strange things started happening."

“That’s a pretty damn good answer Draco. I never would have thought it was you, but now that I
know, I guess it really couldn’t have been anyone else.”

“So, you’re back to Draco now are you.”

She ducked her head and smiled into her glass, bumping against his shoulder a little.

“There really is quite a bit we don’t know about each other isn’t there?”

“Well Draco, you could always just ask me. Or we could just play twenty questions until we know
everything?”

Glancing up at the time it was much earlier than he had anticipated, he knew they both had early
double potions, but neither of them felt very tired.

“Alright, I’ll start us off with something easy then; What’s your favourite colour?”

Thus began a three hour long game of twenty questions (but really went on for weeks). They
finished the firewhiskey and went to bed knowing a combination of the most mundane and
interesting facts about one another. He kept replaying it in his head while trying to sleep;

Her favourite colour was lilac (naturally she had laughed at his choice of green), she liked to be
called ‘Mione but only by close friends (she not so subtly included him on her list, so he took to using
it right away), she was afraid of lightning because it reminded her of the curses flying during the final
battle and her patronus was an otter.

When she had asked if he knew what his was, his reply caught in his throat. He didn’t think he
would ever know what form it took; he could never manage to cast one.

Once he managed to admit it she wrapped him in a hug so tight he couldn’t breathe. She was warm
against him, her touch burning him in a more than pleasant way and the scent of her conditioner
(cloves and mint) stuck with him for hours after: It felt nice to be held and he found himself wanting
more of that contact.

“Maybe now that the war is over you might manage it?”

“I don’t know ’Mione, all I can do is try, but I don’t know if I can.”

“I understand, I’ve always found it difficult to cast. It takes one hell of a powerful memory.”

He fell asleep wondering what form his might have been if he had a happy enough memory to
conjure one. He would have settled for a ferret if it meant having a memory strong enough to cast
one.

oOo

The next morning, Draco woke with a raging hangover. After getting ready for the day he stepped
out of his room and ran right into a phial of hangover cure she had levitated there.

Downing it in one go, the haze cleared, and he noticed the smell of bacon coming from the kitchen.

Walking into the common room he found her cooking breakfast. It smelled amazing and his stomach
growled in spite of the queasy feeling that remained after the potion. He sat down, and she jumped
when he bid her good morning while she was plating up.
“Merlin’s arse! You nearly gave me a heart attack Draco!”

“What’s that?”

“Oh, it’s a muggle idiom that means you gave me a fright; heart attack itself is another way of saying heart failure.”

“You're such a swot.”

“And that’s the perfect example of the pot calling the kettle black”

“You're right, but at least my abilities as a seeker act as a saving grace.”

“Ugh please, do you have any modesty Malfoy?”

“No, not really. By the way, did you notice you only call me by my last name when you're annoyed with me?”

“Huh, I didn’t; but you’ll always be Malfoy to me, no matter how often I use your first name.”

“Who names their kid Draco anyway?”

He knew she was teasing so he smirked and shot back a retort.

“I was named for the constellation; thank you very much. Besides, what kind of name is Hermione?”

She smiled at him and he felt his insides melt. It was nice to have finally found a way to fit their jagged edges together to become friends; still, it didn’t stop him feeling more than that.

After an excellent breakfast (which she had said was a thank you for the toast and tea) they left for potions. Making their way through the multitude of students rushing to morning classes they continued their game of ‘more than twenty questions’.

It was still his turn when they reached the Lab and he was a little nervous to ask his next question.

“Would you like to hang out with Theo, Blaise and myself when we go to Hogsmeade this weekend?”

She stopped at her desk and he couldn’t place the expression on her face when she looked at him.

“I’d like that. you all seem close though, I’d hate to intrude…”

“Nonsense ‘Mione, you’re more than welcome. Besides I don’t think Blaise would believe me if I attempted to retell the Polyjuice story myself.”

“Alrighty then. Guess you can tell me where and when after potions.”

She took her seat after pointing out Slughorn had arrived and he made his way to his own, attempting to suppress the idiotic grin on his face as he walked away.

oOo
Hermione took her usual seat with Neville and met his questioning gaze with one of her own.

“’Mione, did Malfoy just ask you to hang out with the snakes this weekend?”

“You heard him as well as I did Neville.”

“A-and you’re planning to go?”

“Of course, who am I to turn down a chance to make new friends”

“Fair enough ’Mione but I’m not afraid to hex them if they try anything funny.”

Potions went by with relative ease. Past material was being re-covered, considering the events of the previous year Professor Slughorn had decided to re teach a multitude of potions, to set everyone on equal footing for N.E.W.Ts.

They had already covered the theory of Shrinking potions, Hiccoughing Solution and Draught of the Living Death. Their current subject being Felix Felicis with Polyjuice and amormentia to follow: After the holidays they would be assigned partners and expected to produce one of the covered potions as part of their final grade.

Not that it made Hermione nervous. She had brewed most of them before.

At the end of the lesson she waited to catch up with Draco who was trailing out behind the rest of the
They had arithmancy next and she figured they may as well walk together and discuss his invitation to Hogsmeade (she found herself excited to be going).

They chatted as they walked and made plans to meet in the Three Broomsticks on Saturday afternoon. She had become so engrossed in their lighthearted bickering over Firewhiskey versus Butterbeer that she didn’t hear the trip jinx until it was too late. She and Draco fell together, books and quills skittering across the flagstones.

She began collecting their things, not bothering to accio them; When she heard faint echoes of laughter from the alcove above them she was enraged.

A couple of third-years were hiding just out of sight; emerging from the shadows when Draco moved to help her, their expressions twisted into cruel sneers. She had stood and offered a hand to help Draco up when one of the boys pressed his foot into the centre of Draco’s back, pushing him down. She was shaken to see he didn’t fight back, he didn’t even really try to get up.

“Can’t get up Malfoy? Aw, going to run to Azkaban to tell Daddy we tripped you?”

“He’s no better than the mudblood…”

“Fucking blood traitor, stay down where you… Oof!”

He was cut off when Hermione’s fist connected with his jaw. She didn’t bother to think before she acted, she threw all her sense out the window when they called him a traitor.

Being a traitor in this sense was the best thing possible and they would not get away with making out it was a bad thing.

‘So much for interhouse unity’ she thought bitterly.

She didn’t even bother to think about the consequences, she just helped Draco up and half dragged him in the direction of their arithmancy classroom.

“What in Salazar’s name did you do that for!? You could have hurt yourself!”

He pulled her to a stop and shook her a little.

“Merlin’s pants, did I actually hit him that hard?”

The shock started to set in as her brain switched back on.

“Granger, I’ve been on the receiving end of your right hook…it’s a good thing I thought to send a quick healing spell his way, otherwise you’d be badge-less and in detention the rest of the year!”

He started checking her hands and she was reminded of her grand entrance in to their dorm, how he fussed over her. It was sweet really, it felt nice to have someone worry about her a little; even if it did re open wounds caused by losing her parents; she felt her eyes pricking with tears but managed to get them under control. She mentally re-shelved memories of scraped knees, princess band-aids and her Mum’s feather light kisses on various scrapes and bruises over the years.

She tried to concentrate on something else. Like how much it surprised her to realise that they had gone from avoidance, to being as in sync as she often felt with Harry and Ron (maybe alcohol held a magic of its own?) she rather liked feeling that way with Draco. It helped her to put her parents from her mind until she had time to deal with it.
“I didn’t mean to hit him so hard, I just lost my head a bit. Good Godric! I can’t believe I hit a younger student...”

“He deserved it. He called you a-a...”

She was surprised he couldn’t even bring himself to say it. It wasn’t like he was calling her that in this context. But he couldn’t manage to form the word at all.

“No, I didn’t even realise he called me mudblood until after.”

She saw him flinch as she said it and she could see it dawn on him that she had been protecting him.

“I didn’t need you to stand up for me ’Mione.” He mumbled

“It’s not like that’s the worst thing I’ve ever heard about myself though.”

“Well you shouldn’t have to hear it, you did the right thing in the end; it shouldn’t matter!”

“’Mione stop and think about it for a minute. They’re in the same place I was before the war. They don’t know any better and their parents are trying to keep the old ideologies alive. Besides it’s not like I’m able to fight back, I know it’s pathetic to just let it happen but if I retaliate there are worse consequences for me than just detention.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t think; but they’re your housemates, they’re meant to be like family. They shouldn’t be treating you like that. I couldn’t stand it when he tried to say you belonged beneath him. You’ve been trying to prove yourself and they berate you for making the better choice... Have you told anyone about it?”

“I guess I should thank you for doing what I can’t; I’ve wanted to deck that prick for weeks. and no, I haven’t told anyone; it’s my burden to bear, I take it like penance.”

“Even penance can go too far Draco.”

oOo

They resumed walking to class and she continued to ruminate on what had just happened.

She realised that while her reaction was disproportionate, she couldn’t stand those Slytherins painting him as a Judas for turning away from his family’s bigoted ideals. She knew he was right about their situation, but that didn’t mean she had to stand there and listen to where their remarks were headed. It hurt her to see him punished for doing the right thing.

He had done a lot of cruel things in his youth, but he didn’t deserve to be bullied and ostracized for making the right choice. Today had shown her why McGonagall had chosen him as head boy; it wasn’t just about proving himself, it was about fostering change and helping anyone carrying those beliefs see that the ideals he had once held were wrong.

She hadn’t understood what she was really seeing when he would comfort students out of earshot (a big part of the job when dealing with first and second years). she wondered why they went to him, but now; It was abundantly clear to her that he had always been capable of kindness when given the chance; McGonagall must have seen that and decided placing him in such a position would provide a person those students could turn to that understood what they were going through.

Reaching their classroom, he smiled a little when she decided to sit next to him. That small smile melted her heart while letting her know he wasn’t angry about her ‘outburst'.
She completed the lesson rather early and getting bored she glanced over to see where he was up to. He still had his books open, but he had clearly finished. She cast a quick communication enchantment on his blank parchment and wrote a note:

-hello.

He noticed it straight away and picked up his quill to reply.

- there’s only one witch I know smart enough to cast a wandless, wordless charm. Hello yourself.

-Did you notice I seem to have a habit of punching third years?

-ha-ha very funny. It did escape my notice. But I do have the scar to prove your hypothesis.

-I still get compliments on my work. What scar though, I can’t see one?

He tapped the bridge of his nose and she saw the small faded white line.

- Well you’ll have two more come Saturday. Blaise and Theo would never miss the opportunity to thank you for knocking me down a peg or two.

-Please, we both know I knocked you down more than two. I’m sorry about the scar though.

-Fair point. Still not as humiliating as the ferret thing. Close second maybe? And I don’t mind it so much, I definitely deserved it.

-Luna told me that ferrets make great familiars.

-Now you’re just being mean.

-On a different note (ha note, see what I did there-of course you did), who do you want to end up with for the potions project?

-Well I hope it’s you; at least you know what you’re doing (we could always pick Polyjuice and coast through the semester - you won’t have myrtle interrupting). Anyone but Seamus really; I don’t want to blow up the classroom.

-That’s fair, things do seem to go down in flames around him. Also, was that a compliment I spied?

-It’s the truth: though you are still ranked second in that class.

-Yes, but I’m still first in all the rest. however, you aren’t far off my tail.

- No, I’m not, you should watch your back …While I’m thinking of it, I should warn you before Saturday that Blaise and Theo lack filters, if something incendiary should slip out I hope you can overlook it. they are trying, but it’s slightly different for them.

-Thanks for the heads up, I understand. Besides I’ve got fairly thick skin these days. They care about you and it’ll be nice to make a couple of new friends.

-Oh they care about me alright, I expect I’ll be teased mercilessly for bringing a girl along. Last time I did that it was Pansy, and Blaise fucked that group dynamic up by sleeping with her.
-Wait a sec… Blaise was sleeping with her? I heard it was you, if you don’t mind me repeating what I heard from the gossip mill of Gryffindor tower.

-Ugh, sweet Merlin no; Pans and I are just friends. Played together as kids… She’s practically family… Ew.

-Merlin’s beard. I feel awful for you two, that rumor went around for ages.

-It was no big deal. It was weird at first, but once we heard what was being said, we did play into it; for a little fun.

-Ha! That’s brilliant. You know it’s weird knowing something Ginny doesn’t (not that I’d tell her, all a guy has is his reputation).

-Mine is not a reputation worth having.

-You’re telling me you don’t like the Slytherin Sex God moniker?

-Are we really discussing this? I swear you're as bad as Blaise. I think you two will get on just fine.

-VECTOR IS COMING!

He calmly turned his parchment over and moved his textbook and notes to cover it (making it look like he was just rearranging things) before Professor Vector reached their desk. Once the Professor was satisfied they had completed the lesson to her satisfaction they left early.

oOo

They had a break between classes and after Draco got caught up dealing with a couple of Ravenclaw first years being pranked by Peeves (he had expanded his territory it seemed), she went to find Ginny, Luna and Neville.

She found them in their usual spot having lunch. She sat down, completing their circle in the shade. Hermione tried to keep up with their conversation on quidditch (was that all anyone had to talk about?) but found herself lost fairly quickly.

Luna seemed to notice she wasn’t quite meshing and saved her from feeling awkward among the others.

“Your aura is looking much lighter today Hermione.”

“Uh… Thanks Luna. How’s your herbology homework coming?”

“Oh, just fine. I rather like spending time with the Venomous Tentacula, they tell very naughty jokes to the nargles you know; I promised to chat to them this weekend. I’m sure you’ll have a fun weekend too Hermione.”

“So, Neville told you?”

“No... But you’ll get on well with Theodore and Blaise. You should ask them to join us at the room of requirement meet up next week.”

“That sounds like a nice idea Luna, but I’ll test the waters first.”
“Of course. I think we would all get on rather well; If you can get along with Draco, Theo and Blaise; I think the rest of us could too…”

The bell tolled for the next period; the group stood and went their separate ways. She heard Luna mumble something under her breath just catching it as they parted ways:

“Huh, Maybe that's why her aura is lighter? I noticed Draco’s was too.”

She stopped herself from wondering who or what Luna was talking to (sometimes it was easier not to ask) Luna’s comment kept replaying in her mind all the way to Care of Magical Creatures. What on earth did she mean by her aura comment, she didn’t feel any lighter?

Sure, she and Draco had finally managed to find common ground and it did leave her feeling calmer than she had in weeks. Once they got talking, she found they were quite alike; it was nice to joke and laugh with him (his sense of humor fit well with her own). But she didn’t think that would have affected her aura that much. It didn’t worry her, but it did make her curious.

She reached the clearing where CoMC was being held and he nodded her over. They didn’t talk through the lesson, but it was nice to just share space. She found that in the space of twenty-four hours she liked being around him. She wondered where the feeling came from and it didn’t take long for her to realise that she had not only let the past go; but was choosing to ignore it and focus on who he was now. Something shifted when she decided to trust him with her own feelings, she could tell he didn’t feel as anxious around her, and she wasn’t waiting for him to slip up and go right back to his old ways.

It reminded her a little of when she first became friends with Ron and Harry: they had said a few choice things about her (hell she wouldn’t have been in that bathroom with the troll if it weren’t for them). It had taken her a while to trust them completely, she kept waiting for the day one or both of them would turn on her. but it never came.

Draco had taken longer to make amends than Harry and Ron but essentially the situations mirrored one another; there was quite a bit more bad blood between them, but she just had to choose to move forward; the person standing next to her now wasn’t who he used to be. she just had to trust him.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

feel free to leave a comment, feedback or kudos they give me endless motivation and warm fuzzy feels :)

next chapter will be up tomorrow morning :)
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

I know I said this would be up this morning, but there's been some horrid weather where I live and my power has been out most of the day- pair that with a low battery and it's a crappy situation

Also I've done a couple of edits for grammar and spelling on one or two chapters, no major changes to worry about though.

Chapter Notes

Back to Draco's pov and more cuteness in Hogsmeade. Also Blaise and Theo are my faves and I love them so much.

I've made this one a little longer to make up for the late posting
I'd also really like to thank everyone who has left a comment or kudos on this so far, it really warms my heart that people are enjoying this. I write for the fun of it and it's lovely to know I'm not just posting this into the void :)

Anyways :) enjoy the new chapter, I will be writing up a storm this weekend so there'll be an update very soon!

xo Em

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

Draco hadn’t felt so grounded in years, she was a reassuring presence that contributed to his feeling calmer than he had in months; even more so now that they had worked through the awkwardness of their first few weeks.

They had hardly stopped talking since: they bickered, but both were aware that neither felt any malice toward the other. He actually liked their ability to disagree without fault; she was fiery, logical and able to match him in everything (except flying a broom apparently).

They had quickly begun seeking excuses to spend time together over the remainder of the week. Something truly had just clicked. They made a point to sit together in every class possible and at the end of the day they’d be in the library or in their common room; they had even agreed to rig the patrol roster (so they would be on duty together). For Draco Saturday couldn’t come soon enough.

They just seemed to keep learning things about each other and in the process, he figured out that she didn’t really have anyone she felt she could open up to. She admitted to feeling judged, lonely and out of place among most people and he couldn’t help but relate. Ginny and Harry seemed to be the only ones who understood her trauma and were willing to discuss it.
He would be lying if he said he didn’t want to punch Weaselbee in the face for being a main factor in her feeling excluded (though he was more than glad they didn’t seem to be together). He found he wanted to be someone she could count on; maybe that was why things fell into place so easily?

When he had spoken to Theo about the recent developments in their relationship; he had been nothing but supportive (though he made it clear he was betting on them being more than friends).

He had been overjoyed to hear that his advice had paid off and had been surprised that she had resorted to physical violence on Draco’s behalf; Once he found out the reason for her protective behavior, he had sworn his own vengeance against the two boys (Draco spent the better part of an hour talking him down).

Blaise had been just as supportive, if a little more vulgar. He was ecstatic to finally be formally introduced to ‘the future Mrs. Malfoy’ (Draco had gritted his teeth at that comment) and hadn’t stopped pestering Draco with talk of making a move if he wimped out. Nothing was ever serious with Blaise but at least it was funny to listen to.

Saturday came around and he spent the morning swimming in a haze of adrenaline and nerves. Once he caught sight of her wild mane of hair in one of the other carriages to Hogsmeade, his anxiety was quickly replaced by excitement.

She had her own errands to run and wasn’t expected to meet them until later in the afternoon. Blaise and Theo were both off chasing birds (Theo was particularly infatuated with Luna Lovegood and followed her about when the chance arose: Blaise would chase anything in a skirt so he tagged along).

Left to his own devices, he decided to find something to send home to his mother. Heading for the bookshop, he hoped there would be something new since the last time he had been in. Walking through the stacks, he heard familiar voices whispering away in the next aisle; he knew it was rude to eavesdrop but when he realised who it was he couldn’t resist.

“Ginny, I'm so nervous, I don’t know what I'm going to say. I don’t know why, but it feels like a big deal. Maybe because I like him, I'm blowing this out of proportion?”

“'Mione calm down, they're not going to hate you. you're just nervous because you know he wouldn’t have asked if it wasn’t important to him. Liking him has nothing to do with it; you want them to approve of you even if you don’t see it.”

“Ok maybe, but still, what if I make an idiot of myself, or I talk too much… Oh Merlin what if I say something wrong and offend them?!”

“You're going to be fine 'Mione, its not the end of the world, stop stressing you're only going to frizz your hair even more.”

“You're right though Gin, I do want them to like me, regardless of how I feel. Maybe it’s because I know Ron and Harry would either be livid or weird about it. I just don’t want to mess this up.”

“Ok come on, you're in need of a serious chocolate fix to get you over this… Lets go.”

Draco walked further into the shop as they exited. Their conversation was intriguing to say the least and he didn’t want them to know he had overheard.

He wasn’t sure how he felt about her being so nervous: on the one hand it was sweet she wanted to
make a good impression. On the other; she was nervous about said impression because she wanted them to approve of her (as if that was going to be an issue). That was plain concerning.

Why did she want to seek approval for the sake of Potter and Weasel’s opinions? She had mentioned liking someone and he assumed she was referring to their newfound friendship; but why be so worried about it? surely if he could let sleeping dogs lie, they could too?

After finding something for his mother, he decided to find out what fresh horrors could be found in Zonkos; now that they were stocking a few new products (courtesy of Weasleys Wizard Wheezes assistance in the store’s re-opening), he knew there would be plenty of detentions to go round for students who dared to test them out (as head boy he figured he ought to know what he would be up against).

He found Theo and Blaise inside plotting a bit of mischief and sauntered up with every intent of shooting down their dastardly plans; which were more than likely to do with Blaise trying to grab Pansy’s attention in the most horrid way possible.

He herded his two friends out of the store and they headed for The Three Broomsticks before they could get themselves into any trouble.

There were a few other eighth years about, but otherwise it was quiet. With enough room to spread out, Theo put his feet up on the chair opposite him and nodded off. Draco could never understand how his friend managed to fall asleep in public, but then again nightmares do lead to exhaustion.

Draco and Blaise took to chatting about quidditch to pass the time. Being late October, they were still training hard and were looking strong already. The first match of the championship would be the first since the war ended and it was Slytherin Vs Gryffindor. Inter house unity was going to go right out the window once they were on the pitch and everyone knew it; but it didn’t lessen the excitement any.

The time passed fairly quickly. A few butterbeers later and maybe one or two firewhiskeys and they were feeling quite merry. The little bell on the door announced the entrance of a new patron and Draco flicked his eyes up to see who it was. He was met by Hermione’s warm smile and she stepped over to their table leaving Weaselette and Longbottom behind.

Reaching their table, she leaned in to quietly ask if she might join them earlier than expected, and he had to suppress a shiver at her proximity. She started to ask if she was being rude but before she could finish, he pulled her down into the seat next to him with an exaggerated roll of his eyes. Blaise had clearly overheard her. Thus, began his ardent assurances that she was more than welcome to turn up early if it meant more time in her presence. If it hadn’t been so funny, Draco would have been incredibly annoyed at how thickly Blaise was laying it on. Already referring to her using a few Italian endearments which clearly made her a little unsettled; Draco felt a twinge of possessiveness and knew that was why Blaise was being so brash.

Hermione was simply brilliant. Already fending off Blaise’s flirting and joking with Theo about their mutual hatred of divination. She fitted into his world perfectly and they got on as though they had been friends for years.

Having overheard her in the bookshop, he couldn’t help but feel proud of her for overcoming her nerves (he admired her courage). Observing her demeanor as time passed, he saw the anxiety drain out of her. She was engaging, funny and took none of their shit (thank Merlin she didn't seem partial to Blaise or his incessant flirting). Watching her enjoying herself warmed his hear to no end.
House rivalry being what it was, many students (including Draco) never saw how much in common they all had. Theo and Blaise were practically the Slytherin equivalent of Potter and Weasel. Always up to something mischievous.

If you had asked him a year ago if he thought he would be swapping stories over firewhiskey with Granger and his mates, he would have suggested a trip to St. Mungos. But here they were, laughing over the golden trio’s encounter with a cerberus named Fluffy in first year.

“We wouldn’t have been in any danger had it not been for Draco and Harry’s ongoing pissing contest! If this idiot hadn’t challenged Harry to a duel to get him caught out of bed after curfew, we wouldn’t have had to hide in there!”

She jabbed his arm with her finger in mock anger.

“Geez Drake, I remember when you did that, didn’t you end up with a detention anyway?”

“Yeah, I did; but not for the dueling thing... I snuck out to catch them going to Hagrid’s after... I snitched and got detention for breaking the rules to catch them.”

That sent Theo and Blaise into a fit of laughter, before Hermione spoke:

“Ugh, that detention gave me nightmares for months... I remember you came out of the forest with your hair standing on end.”

She turned to Blaise and Theo and pretended to whisper behind her hand

“Which considering the amount of product he had in it, was no mean feat.”

Blaise and Theo teased him further by pulling their hair back to mock his old style, leaving the entire table in stitches.

“You know Granger I overheard Harry talking to Weasley once and he said Drake here screamed louder than a banshee.”

“Blaise; I was eleven and saw Voldy drinking blood from a unicorn; if Potter had any sense, he would have been screaming too.”

She snorted in a very unladylike (though equally adorable) fashion at his statement and tried to hold back her laughter before speaking again

“That’s, actually a fair point, it was still funny at the time though. You were such a prat”

“Oh, I’ll give you that one Granger... and it was pretty funny, looking back.”

Their lighthearted bickering had Theo and Blaise nudging each other while they tried to cover their excited expressions. Draco would be sure to give them hell for being so obvious about it.

Eventually it came time to leave. Theo and Blaise usually pissed off before being roped into keeping Draco company while he rounded up the stragglers, clearly they hadn’t wanted the afternoon to end either, so they walked together as the Heads did their final checks.

They took the last carriage, joking and laughing all the way to the castle. Arriving back, Hermione
left them with an invite to the Room of Requirement Wednesday night (along with a warning that it
would be mostly Gryffindors and to play nice). She left to find Ginny and get her things, once they
had agreed to attend.

Theo and Blaise were certainly excited at the prospect of observing the lions in their pride. Draco
had to laugh at the mental image. It felt nice to be included, but Draco now understood why
Hermione had felt so nervous about meeting his friends. Second impressions were important.

Draco headed down to the Dungeons with them and endured the near constant teasing about how
besotted he looked in Hermione’s presence. He hadn’t thought he had been that obvious, but they
did know him better than anyone.

They had simply adored her; mentioning more than a few times that they wished they’d had the
opportunity to befriend her back in first year. They appreciated many of the same things Draco did
and went so far as to thank him for bringing such a kindred spirit into their group.

After spouting compliments for a while, they went right back to teasing him; he didn’t mind it in the
least, considering it was the truth. At least this time he was able to get his own back by mentioning
Luna would be attending Wednesday. Theo had paled at the thought and decided perhaps it was best
to keep his mouth shut, lest he be in Draco’s position by morning. They really could be merciless
with one another.

He stayed with Blaise and Theo a while longer; keeping his eye on the time, he decided it was late
enough to head back to his dorm. As he was leaving Blaise kindly reminded him that if he didn’t
make a move he would step in to ‘woo the lovely lady’ himself.

That same possessive feeling reared up in him again and he fought the instinct to snap at his friend.
Heading to his dorm he didn’t have to wonder why the thought bothered him so much. But he was
currently in no position to act on his feelings for her. He didn’t want to act until he could be sure she
reciprocated; and if she never felt that way, he would gladly step aside if it meant seeing her happy.

He wouldn’t like it, but in the end that was all he wanted for her; even if it meant he wasn’t part of
the reason. Just being near her would have to be enough. Though he did have to wonder if her earlier
admissions to Ginny held more than a platonic meaning. It was a flicker of hope, but he knew the
timing would need to be right for it to grow from a flicker into something more. There was also the
matter of the Weasel; he hadn’t known how to ask what her feelings for him were; it seemed wildly
inappropriate to ask her directly. He might have to use a little of his Slytherin cunning to find out
soon.

oOo

She was in the common room when he stepped through the portrait; standing on her toes and
stacking her new books on the bookshelf. Two cups of tea stood steaming on the counter... She was
waiting for him to get back. He joined her and placed his own books in the adjoining case; leaving
his mothers on his desk for later.

“Which cup is mine?”

“The one with the giant smiley face.”

"Thanks 'Mione."

He laughed a little at the gaudy yellow cup, taking a sip he moved to sit by the fire and waited for her
to join him. She finished sorting her books and crossed the room. She tugged one of the armchairs
closer to where he was seated and curled up in it; clutching her own mug with both hands.

He spoke first, sensing she was still a little worried about how the afternoon had gone.

“They loved you, you know. Talked about how amazing they thought you were, all the way to the dungeons.”

“Really?”

“Yep; they can’t wait for Wednesday either. Don’t tell anyone, but Theo’s got it bad for Lovegood… Be on the watch for intense pining and goo-goo eyes; it’ll make for excellent teasing or blackmail material.”

“Wow I never would have thought! Don’t you dare tease him for it; I think it’s sweet.”

“All the more reason to. But I suppose you haven’t had to listen to him talk about her. Merlin the way he goes on and on… Alright I guess it is sweet. We’ll still tease him though”

“Aww, aren’t you the secret romantic…I might be able to get a little intel if he’d like? remind me to ask him when we get to potions tomorrow…”

“…And thanks for putting my mind at ease about today, I was still a little worried they might have just tolerated me being there.”

“Are you kidding! ‘Mione, they never want to hang about when I have duties, they’re usually off before I can blink. They were enjoying themselves so much they stayed until we were ready to leave, just so they could ride back with us.”

Her face lit up then and seeing her so happy was like Christmas, easter and every birthday rolled into one.

“I wanted them to stay too! I hadn’t had so much fun since before the war… and they remind me so much of Ron and Harry its crazy. All those pranks and the sneaking around; it was lovely to reminisce with people who understood the thrill of breaking the rules a little; even if I did have to get used to it at first, goody two shoes that I am.”

“goody two shoes indeed: I remember how indignant you looked when McGonagall gave us that first detention. Like you couldn’t believe she thought you were in on the mischief too. I had to stop myself from laughing when I saw.”

She smiled again and tried to hide her blush behind her mug.

“It seems you used to watch me quite a bit Draco.”

It was his turn to hide a blush, the heat of it crept down his neck uncomfortably fast.

“I guess I was a little fascinated by you. The know-it-all who hung out with my two arch nemeses…”

He felt his cheeks heat further and prayed she would drop the subject before he said something stupid; Like how much he had liked her despite his own beliefs.

He thanked Merlin that she did.

“So, Wednesday will likely be a little different than what you’re used to. We basically get drunk playing muggle board games.”
“That actually sounds like a lot of fun. Though Blaise and Theo might be a little annoyed if its going to be Monopoly. They’re terrible at it… last time we played they ended up in jail and bankrupt in two minutes.”

“Hang on, you’ve played monopoly?”

“Why is that surprising? It’s fun and intelligent…”

“It’s just unexpected, in the best of ways.”

“That’s fair. After the war I found I actually quite liked the muggle world and what it had to offer; once I dragged Blaise and Theo into it, they ended up hooked too.”

“Huh. So, what other discoveries did you make?”

“Well I personally love movies; I dragged those two gits with me to the cinema more times than I could count. I’d love to get something set up here, but it’s tricky without electricity. I’m getting close to figuring it out though.”

“What about Blaise and Theo, what are they into?”

“Well, Blaise is obsessed with cars and racing, which is cliché I know considering he’s Italian: As for Theo he’s addicted to anything tech related, I swear that Gameboy never leaves his hand.”

“You know; I don’t know why I was so worried; you three are going to fit in perfectly. Hell, you’ll understand things better than most of the people coming… Do you know how long it took me to explain VCR’s to them? And here you are trying to invent a way to set one up here!”

“You’ll be the first to know once I figure it out.”

“You just keep finding ways to surprise me.”

He stood then and offered to take her cup. She handed it over and his fingers ghosted over hers leaving a tingling sensation where they had touched. He mentally shook himself as he headed to the kitchen, he was being such a Hufflepuff about touching her; but the fact she hadn’t flinched left him feeling warm and fuzzy.

By the time he returned to his chair, she had pulled out a book and had picked up where she had left off. He accio’d his latest find from Tomes and Scrolls and sat reading with her until the early hours of the morning.

He knew he wouldn’t see her Sunday morning; she usually went to see Weaselette, but the afternoon brought the promise of spending more time together; a prospect which excited him more than he thought possible.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

Please feel free to leave a comment, feedback or kudos. They are like an injection of coffee and redbull and give me endless motivation to write.
Despite having such a wonderful Saturday, Hermione awoke feeling as though someone had dropped a house on her; the irony of her analogy made her smile to herself. Her nightmares had been worse than usual, and she thanked Circe for Silencing Charms. Her voice was hoarse from screaming in her sleep and she felt jittery and hollow. She showered and dressed quickly, a cloud of anxiety and exhaustion hanging over her.

Not feeling up to socializing she decided to make her own breakfast. She summoned an elf who nervously accepted her request for ingredients. (it still annoyed her they didn’t want to be freed, but at least the school made sure they were well looked after).

While she waited for the elf to return, she walked down Draco’s hall to see if he wanted to join her. Knocking gently on the door she heard him stumble about a bit before opening the door. He cracked it open and looked down at her with bleary eyes which brightened once he registered who was in front of him.

“G’morning "Mione.”

Merlin’s beard… Where was his shirt!? She kicked her brain into gear before he could catch her staring and felt her heart fluttering about in her chest. ‘Don’t blush, don’t blush, don’t blush’ she tried to command her body to no avail; her cheeks heated and she hoped they weren’t flushed enough for him to notice.

“Morning Draco… I’m, um… I’m awfully sorry if I woke you…I didn’t really feel like going down to the great hall for breakfast, so I’m making pancakes; but I uh, thought I might see if you wanted some?”
Since when was she so nervous around him? For Godric’s sake could she be any more obvious? She was worse than Ginny. But there was simply no denying that the half-naked and slightly disheveled Draco standing in front of her wasn’t a sight to behold. Sleep in his eyes and his voice still rough from sleep had her going a little weak at the knees (weak in her brain too apparently).

“Sure, sounds great. Give me a minute and I’ll help.”

She nodded and headed back towards the kitchen, the soft click of his door closing followed behind her.

Mentally kicking herself for such tactless behavior she hardly noticed the ingredients on the countertop. She absentmindedly started preparing but found herself wondering if his skin was as soft to touch as it looked. Pale and lithe, he had a seeker’s build. Not overly muscular but still strong. A far cry from the thin almost dead look he had sported during the war.

Her attention was drawn back to her task when she dropped a bowl and it clattered onto the floor.

“For fucks sakes!” she hissed to herself

‘it’s not like it’s the first time you’ve seen a boy with his shirt off, get a grip!’ she thought.

Picking up the bowl, she tried to concentrate on the task at hand. Her mind had other, more tantalizing ideas… caught up in her daydreaming she knocked flour on herself, spilled some of the milk and was positively annoyed when she almost dropped the whisk, getting pancake batter all over herself instead. This morning was not going well.

Whilst cleaning herself up she heard his door close. He walked in, clearly still half asleep but mercifully fully dressed…though his quidditch shirt did fit in all the right places… ‘SNAP OUT OF IT HERMIONE!’ She tried not to look at him as she ignited the stove. When she turned to get the batter, she burst out laughing.

His hair was in as much of a state as hers or maybe Harry’s on a bad day; which was saying something. He frowned a little at her reaction and she couldn’t help but make a remark.

“Merlin what happened? Did you get hit by lightning during the night?”

He pouted at her and damn if it didn’t look adorable. But there was something a little darker about his eyes that worried her.

“Sorry… it’s just I’ve never seen you looking any less than perfect.”

Sweet Circe did she just call him perfect to his face? Too late to take it back now. At least he didn't seem to notice

“Why are you apologizing? You didn’t say anything wrong.”

“I know but… You just look a little more exhausted than usual and I didn’t notice until just then and I thought I might have struck a nerve…”

“Nightmares.”

He didn’t need to say anything else. His single word interruption summed it all up perfectly. She found herself wanting to comfort him.

“I have them too; Do you want to talk about it?”
“Not really, they’re fairly horrific.”

“I understand, so are mine. Most of them are about the people love dying. It’s not pleasant.”

“I know exactly what you mean. Mine are too.”

They didn’t talk much after that. They worked together; frying, flipping and laughing at each other’s failures until the batter had become a sizeable stack of pancakes. They sat and ate and started making conversation to pass the time.

One thing she liked about Draco was that even idle prattle was interesting, it had more depth than the usual small talk she was subjected to. It was something she had sought out among most of her friends but hadn’t found. He seemed to instinctively know how much she needed someone she could open up to, without feeling judged. He understood what she had been through and didn’t make her feel less for struggling to cope with it.

Ron and Harry were strong believers in the ‘bottling everything up’ method; only talking about it when they had to. Harry had his training, focusing on anything but the war. Ron followed Harry but refused to remove the chip off his shoulder, he didn’t hate the attention as much as herself and Harry.

Ginny hadn’t been through the Horcrux hunt itself, though she did understand how it felt to be manipulated by one. As for Neville, Luna and the others; they never quite got how it felt to try to re enter society as a war hero, who was unable to handle the aftermath of success.

She’d had no one, but Draco understood right away. He seemed to know what she needed from him and gave it to her freely. He never pushed, he considered her feelings, never judged, trusted her with his secrets, made her laugh when she had felt there was no joy to be found in her soul and so much more. She never felt she had to be anything more than herself; for him it was clearly enough. He had quickly become the companion she needed and she began to trust him with glimpses behind her own carefully constructed façade.

oOo

She didn’t go to see Ginny that Sunday.

She stayed with Draco and they whiled away the hours reading, talking, snacking and drinking tea by the fire. It got late and neither of them noticed they had missed dinner. Eventually he fell asleep on the couch. He looked so young and unguarded, it was beguiling: His book was splayed across his chest. She had gently taken it off him, bookmarked his page and watched him sleep until she drifted off herself.

Her nightmares returned, and he woke her from them a few hours later. She was glad he was there, she had needed to reassure herself that he was safe. Her nightmares had been about him this time. They were so vivid she had thought she had accidentally divined his past. She saw him beaten, cursed, healed and cursed some more; she saw him taunted by his aunt, his mother beaten in front of him and she was powerless to stop it. A witness to the horror with no escape.

She must have screamed and woken him up. He reassured her and held her as she sobbed uncontrollably into his shoulder; frantically trying to convince herself it was just a dream. He carried her to her room once she had calmed down a little and she held onto him for a little while longer before entering her room. He didn’t say anything, but he held her just as tightly and that was enough.

He didn’t bring it up the next morning, but he did have toast and tea waiting for her on the table; like he knew she wouldn't be able to stomach anything more. This time around he stayed and ate with
her; it was a small gesture, but it meant everything to her. By the time they reached their first class of the day they were chatting away excitedly about the solution to a particularly difficult arithmancy assignment. Both trying to take their minds off the night before.

Tuesday came and went; they left their dorm together, separated to eat with their housemates, met back up to head to class, sat together and passed notes once they had finished their work. She found herself looking over at him often; not for any reason other than he was where her gaze happened to settle.

He still didn't try to make her talk about Sunday night. Her anxiety faded once she realised he wasn't going to talk about it unless she did. It was nice to know her feelings were respected. These days it was all too easy to do the opposite.

Wednesday passed in a blur and Theo, Blaise Draco and Hermione found themselves running late. Luna was waiting for them outside the Room of Requirement and when Theo spotted her she noticed the two of them blush.

It certainly wasn’t going to be hard to set those two up, Luna clearly liked Theo too.

The room had already accommodated for additional guests and they took their places around the table and got to work on breaking the ice.

Neville, Luna, Ginny, Dean and Seamus had already set out a selection of games and Dean had suggested they start off with something classic to get everyone sloshed before moving on to something else.

Giant Jenga was the obvious choice. Their set had been charmed to give hilarious challenges to those playing and the fact that they had magic meant that it was giant in every sense of the word. Levitation spells were a necessity.

By the end of the first game, all of them had downed their fair share of alcohol; some were missing items of clothing, others were missing a little dignity and Neville and Blaise could hardly look at one another (Blaise had drawn ‘kiss the person to your left’… Neville was ‘left’). It was a resounding success.

The booze started to kick in and they moved on to Operation; chatting and laughing like old friends. It was the perfect game to test how tipsy they all were. They split into two teams and depending on how you looked at it they were either all winners or all losers.

Next up, Kings cup. Hermione hadn’t fared so well and ended up drawing the last king. the group cheered her on as she downed a combination of elf wine, firewhiskey, beer, vodka and chocolate liqueur; courtesy of Ginny (how does she drink that stuff?).

It tasted awful and she choked it down, not wanting it to come back up.

Ginny decided to round out the night with a game of truth (dare was omitted because Filch seemed to have a nose for mischief and none of them wanted detention). They all wrote a number of questions down and placed them in an enlarged cup. Ginny charmed the slips of paper with a weak truth spell of her own invention and the game began.

Theo drew first, nothing too scandalous; most embarrassing moment
“Well I'm a walking disaster anyway, but probably tripping over my cloak at a gala, in front of the Greengrass sisters.”

Dean drew the next question and after finding a loophole, confirmed he’d had a sex dream about one or more of their professors. (the question didn’t ask him to name names).

Neville admitted to being terrified of all birds except owls and Ginny refused to answer her question, taking a drink instead. Hermione drew the ever present 'first kiss' question and blushed admitting it was Victor Krum (though Blaise voiced his surprise it hadn’t been Ron). Blaise and Seamus both had fairly tame questions and Draco drew last.

She watched for his reaction and saw his eyes widen and his ears go slightly pink. He quickly grabbed his drink before he had to answer and downed it in one go.

The game dragged on for one more round before most of them were too far gone to continue. They had laughed and drank and gotten along. Theo had flirted with Luna, Ginny was asleep on Neville. All in all, it had been a wonderful night, she couldn't help but feel glad the Slytherins had meshed so well and it had been made very clear that they were welcome to join in any time.

It had gotten rather late and for those who were able; well past time to head back to their own inviting beds.

Hermione roused the three Slytherins now chatting away in the corner and snagged the marauders map from Ginny’s back pocket (a gift from Harry). The four of them left the room and with the help of the map; snuck back to the dungeons. Once Theo and Blaise had finished thanking her for inviting them and gone inside with promises of making plans soon; she and Draco started to make their way back to their own dorm.

They narrowly avoided Filch and stumbled out of their hiding place, muffling giggles behind their hands. Walking arm in arm, They whispered along the way; thinking up ideas for future games nights. They managed to get back to their dorm without being caught and decided to hang about in the common room for a while, hoping to tire themselves out.

“Thanks for letting the three of us tag along tonight 'Mione.”

“You're more than welcome, everyone loved you guys, and did you see Luna? She couldn't keep her eyes off Theo the entire time!”

“I did! I’ll bet those two are together by Christmas.”

“Not much of a bet considering I agree with you.”

“Fair point…”

“…So, Victor Krum eh?”

“What about him?”

“He was your first?”

“First kiss, nothing else.”

“I would have bet money on it being the Weasel.”

“No; I eventually kissed Ron, but that blew up in my face completely.”
“I'm sorry to hear that.”

“You don’t sound too sorry Draco.”

“He was dumb enough to fuck it up, I don’t feel bad for him.”

“Alright, that’s enough about my disaster of a love life... What was that question you didn’t want to answer?”

“It was nothing.”

“If you say so... but I saw that blush. It was about a girl wasn’t it?”

“So what if it was?”

“Well who would have been your answer to this mystery question?”

“It’s no fun if I tell you. Besides it’ll be fun to see how far you’ll go to get the answer out of me.”

She did her best to replicate his pout from the other day and she saw him smile seeing the childish expression cross her features. She realised he had been looking at her far too long, with an expression that screamed he was biting back what he wanted to say. After she caught his eye, he glanced away to look at the time as though he hadn’t just been staring.

A moment later, he stood and offered her a hand. Pulling her up out of her armchair, he bid her a quick goodnight, thanked her again for a wonderful evening, turned on his heel and was down his hall before she could even blink.

She went to bed feeling confused. That look had left her wondering if his anxious behavior had something to do with her and that question. but it couldn’t be? Could it? it would have to be a problem for her sober mind.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

i live for feedback and questions so feel free to leave a comment or just drop a kudos if you’re enjoying this :) they give me endless energy and are like my personal pepper up potion :)

next chapter will be up as soon as i can write it (so not long)

xo Em
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Draco's POV again :)

no need for warnings on this chapter

Chapter Notes

We have a few of Draco's reactions to events to start off and then we have a time jump of about a month for the second half of the chapter.

I know it might seem like I'm gearing up for some Ron bashing, I'm not going to do that. He will be a mature adult and take responsibility, but there might be a twist to the tale next chapter.

hope you enjoy this one, let me know what you think
xo Em

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

‘She’s definitely in denial’ he thought. It was turning out to be a better morning than he could have asked for.

Then he had messed it all up when he didn’t catch her attempt at humor. He didn’t like bringing her mood down with his own issues; but her offer of comfort was sincere, which warmed his heart.

They had cooked in silence and he noticed how well they worked together. Never in the others way; he truly hoped Slughorn would put them together on the potions assignment (cooking wasn’t so different to potions in his opinion, little she knew he wasn’t limited to tea and toast).

They had eaten together, made small talk and just when he thought she would leave… she settled into an armchair with a book. She caught his eye a few moments later with a look that said:

‘Are you coming?’

He had no intention of turning her down. Grabbing his own book, he settled on the lounge next to her rather than taking an armchair. The morning passed as they enjoyed time in one another’s presence. Eventually they had both needed to stretch out and so, ended up sitting with their legs tangled, feet resting in each other’s laps. It was domestic and comfortable and strangely intimate for him despite being platonic.

At some point he conjured snacks, though both were too engrossed in their reading to notice that it was past time they should be hungry. Seeing as it was a Sunday, they were both reading fiction. He was reading Austen and she was about half way through re-reading A Game of Thrones (the new
book would be out soon, and she wanted it fresh in her mind apparently). Night fell and even though he was usually a night owl, he found himself drifting off.

His nightmares didn’t start right away, his mind’s eye stayed blessedly clear for a while. When he heard Hermione’s scream, he assumed that it was in his head. Just a prelude in the nightly symphony that accompanied the images in his subconscious.

She screamed again, and he jolted awake; wand at the ready to defend or attack. Adrenaline coursing through his veins left him feeling chilled. Surveying the scene, he quickly realised she was experiencing a hell all her own.

Seeing the sheer terror etched into her features, he shook her awake. Her eyes flew open, fixing on him with wild intensity before filling with tears. She held onto him so tightly and he wondered what she had seen that upset her so much. He rocked her as she wept, not saying anything much; just whispered reassurances.

Something about the way she was touching him suggested she wasn’t sure he was real. At one point she had cupped his face in her hands, brushing her thumbs across his cheekbones as though she were wiping away tears only she could see. He had almost cried at the way she was looking at him; he had never seen such fierce emotion directed at him before and it shook him to his core.

Once she settled down a little he gently lifted her up and out of the armchair. It wasn’t necessary, but it felt so natural cradling her against his chest that he didn’t think about it until he was setting her down outside her door.

He went to bed thinking about how much she must trust him, to allow him to see such raw emotion and then comfort her. He had a sneaking suspicion no one had ever witnessed that part of her; he felt strangely honoured to be privy to such a vulnerable moment.

He knew not to bring it up unless she did, he knew from his own experience that she would be anxious about it; he also knew that she likely wouldn’t want to eat if she’d had such a traumatic nightmare (that’s how he usually reacted to them). So, he set up a light breakfast and stayed to make sure she had something.

Whatever she needed him to be from here on out, he would be.

oOo

Monday, she had needed someone to take her mind off things and keep her grounded. So, he treated her as he would any other day; the worst thing he could do was treat her like glass. He kept conversation light and tried to steer her away from anything too serious or triggering; in case she felt he was pressuring her to talk about it before she was ready. After all, she had respected his wish not to speak about his own: He could at least show her the same courtesy, while proving he didn’t see her any differently.

Tuesday was much the same; she seemed to have slept better and looked much less haunted. Whatever she was seeing when sleep took hold; it was not something she could just get over. He regretted having a fair idea just how many experiences would be worthy of such terror. He watched her at breakfast to make sure she ate and walked with her to class. It seemed just being there made her calmer.

Wednesday she was almost back to normal; Well, normal for war survivors he supposed.

They laughed and bickered as per usual and there was excitement in the air as they waited out the
hours until Games night.

Aside from showing up late it had been a blast. He had never thought hanging out with Gryffindors could be so much fun. Once they had gotten used to the Slytherin intruders it had been smooth sailing and a lot more laughing. The alcohol helped, but they wouldn’t really have needed it to get along. The swapped stories, played games and got to know each other in the process.

Weaselette (though he supposed he ought to call her Ginny if they were going to be friends) had been a riot; full of saucy tales about The-Boy-Who-Lived. Luna had shamelessly flirted with Theo for most of the night and Blaise was in his element chatting to Dean and Seamus about some action film or other that had been released.

He liked seeing his friends happy. They had been as excluded as he was and were still struggling with the way people perceived them based on their last names. It was slightly easier for them, in that they didn’t carry the dark mark; but their reputations were tainted just the same. This group however, chose to take the three of them at face value and though they were still on the outskirts of this tight-knit family; they were being given a chance and that was all that mattered.

The final game of the evening was his least favourite of all time. He knew there was going to be trouble at some point, it was a matter of when. He seemed to have the worst luck with games like this; he just hoped he wasn’t drunk enough to say something stupid.

He hardly paid attention to anyone’s answer but hers. She answered who her first kiss was, and he was only a little surprised. Her question had been incredibly tame in comparison to the one he drew. He had to wonder if Ginny had written this one considering how specific it was.

‘Tell the group your ultimate sexual fantasy and who it’s about.’

Salazar help him, there was no way he was answering that with Hermione sitting across from him; certainly not under the effect of a light truth spell. It would be just plain inappropriate. If he ever felt the time was right to tell her how he felt, he certainly wouldn’t go about it by admitting she was usually the catalyst for him getting off.

He felt himself blush and quickly downed his drink to escape the effect of the truth spell lacing the slip of paper. The last thing he needed was to admit that over the years, imagined her in a number of scenarios; fueled by teenage hormones and her status as something temptingly forbidden.

He really hoped she didn’t notice how uncomfortable he was. that would only serve to make things worse. Thank Merlin everyone seemed to be down for the count… hopefully no one was paying much attention.

He declined to join another round. Choosing to chat with his two incredibly intoxicated housemates. Eventually Hermione came over and offered Theo and Blaise a way back to their beds without being caught.

Pulling out a piece of worn parchment, she muttered something and explained that it was a map of the castle showing everyone’s locations.

Such an ingenious enchantment, he would have to remember to ask her about it when he sobered up.

They all managed to get back to their respective dorms without detection, but he found he didn’t want to leave her presence so soon. She appeared to have the same idea; so, he struck up a conversation, with the ulterior motive of inquiring about her relationship status.

Like the fool he was, he had almost said more than he had wanted to. So, he resorted to teasing her
and fled.

In the month that followed the first interhouse games night, things had stayed fairly stagnant. Draco and Hermione still spent as much time as possible together. He went to training, Slytherin ended up beating Gryffindor in the first match of the season, they studied together, and nothing seemed set to change.

Then she missed an entire afternoon of classes.

He had seen her before breakfast, then they had sat together through ancient runes and arithmancy and everything had seemed fine. But she failed to show up for potions and the rest of the days lessons; which worried him immensely.

He made sure to duplicate his notes for her, knowing that she wouldn’t want to miss anything and raced up to their dorm as soon as the last class of the day ended; hoping to find her there.

She wasn’t in the common room, so he walked down her hall and knocked on her door ever so gently. When there was no answer he decided to knock again, just to be sure.

“You can come in Draco, it’s not locked.”

Her voice was hoarse, and she sounded stuffy. He tentatively opened the door and quickly deduced she had been crying. Her eyes were red and puffy and every few seconds she sniffled. He sat down on the edge of her bed.

“Um, you look a bit upset ‘Mione… do you want me to see if I can find Ginny?”

She huffed and pulled him up to sit beside her, he mirrored her position and leant back against the headboard. She hadn’t said anything yet, instead she grabbed his hand and clasped it tightly; the look in her eyes said stay. He had to wonder why; maybe after the nightmares incident she felt more comfortable being open with him?

Being friends was more confusing than being enemies sometimes. Her heart was very much on her sleeve now though, that much was clear. He would need to tread carefully.

He could see fresh tears rolling down her cheeks and not wanting to press for information, settled for giving her a gentle nudge. That seemed to remind her that he had no idea what he had just walked into and she started searching about for something. Once she had found it, she placed a copy of Witch Weekly in his lap.

Looking at the front page made everything quite clear. It made sense she didn’t want Ginny to see her and his heart dropped knowing her tears were caused by one red headed weasel.

Splashed across the front page were photos of Lavender Brown and Weaselbee; on what appeared to be a very romantic date. Instinct told him that wasn’t what had upset Hermione.

Large bold font emblazoned on the page told the wizarding world that the “GOLDEN GIRL CAN’T BEAT THE GIRL WITH GOLDEN CURLS.”

He looked back at Hermione who seemed to be watching his reactions. He wasn’t sure what his expressions conveyed but inside he was equal parts enraged and curious.

‘Is she seriously upset about the Weasel and this bint getting back together? Why does she want me
here? How am I supposed to sit here and comfort her when I couldn’t be fucking happier that whatever they may, or may not have had is over? Does that make me a bad person?? I’m already a bad person… But Merlin help me; there has to be some other reason for her reacting like this… She wouldn’t cry, she’d hex him into oblivion if that was all he had done.’

Draco’s mind was racing, and he wasn’t quite sure what he was supposed to do. Then she spoke.

“The front page isn’t even the worst part. Read the article on page 5.”

Wanting to know what could be worse than pictures of the Weasel playing tonsil hockey with Lavender, he opened the magazine and began to read. If he had been livid before, he was positively outraged now.

The article consisted of an interview with the couple paired with Rita Skeeter’s own musings. It was sickening.

The interview was mostly a tactless discussion about Ron and Lavender rekindling their romance in July, because the weasel had been left with consistently blue bollocks. He went on to say that Hermione was cold, prudish and everything Lavender wasn’t (not to mention too smart for her own good and an utter bore)

Draco couldn’t believe the Weasel could be so improper and inconsiderate. No, actually… He could.

Lavender had gone on to list all the ways she thought Hermione failed as a woman and had outright stated that “The golden girl wasn’t enough of a looker to keep a man anyway.”

Reading that line, he squeezed her hand a little tighter. That was the furthest thing from the truth and he ought to know; she had no idea she had him firmly wrapped around her little finger (and not just because of her looks either).

Skeeter continued by insinuating that Hermione had a pattern of enticing men and leaving them heartbroken or out in the cold. She painted her as a plain jane, ice queen and just to add insult to injury; suggested that keeping one’s legs crossed was something to be ashamed of.

“You know ‘Mione if you want help Hexing those three, I’d gladly go to Azkaban for the privilege of assisting.”

“Sure Draco, like I’d let that happen”

She sniffled, and he offered her the box of tissues on her nightstand. He felt a little jolt of affection run though him at her protective jibe. Still wanting to understand why she looked so heartbroken, he prodded her for answers.

“So why has this got you so upset? based on what the Weasel had to say, be thankful you didn’t sleep with him. As for the rest of that garbage, just ignore it”

‘Oh it’s not like Skeeter hasn’t written awful things about me before. And as for Ron I know I dodged a bullet there…We would never have worked; I realised I wanted an equal, someone who could challenge me but at the end of the day complimented my personality. I’ve made peace with the fact that person wasn’t Ron. We stayed friends after, but now I don’t know how I’m ever going to face him without hexing his balls off.”

“What really upsets me is that He said they got together in July. We were still trying to make it work then; long distance you know? We didn’t break things off until the end of August. It hurts to know that he lied to me.”
He picked up what she was putting down and the weight of his realisation hit like a ton of bricks.

“That fucker cheated on you?”

She nodded and a few more tears slid down her cheeks. His rage turned white hot and he couldn’t help but imagine a million different ways to make the slimy git suffer.

“I mean, am I not good enough for him to want to try? I know I’m an insufferable know it all, but he chased me for years; only to give up when things didn’t go as fast as he thought. Was I wrong to make him wait? I just wanted to be sure it would work between us before we took things further; he took it as me being frigid.”

‘She keeps using that word, frigid?’

Admittedly the thought of her sleeping with the Weasel was abhorrent, but once he managed to take in her words he understood.

Recalling their conversation about Krum and a few other hints she had accidentally dropped, he realised: It wasn’t just that she had post war commitment jitters; she wanted to be sure before she gave everything to him and that fucking idiot couldn’t wait for her.

‘Salazar save me; she’s a virgin. But what on earth am I supposed to say to her without coming off like a creep?’

He quickly came up with something that would hopefully suffice:

“Hermione I’ve said this before, and I’ll say it again: He fucked up. But you shouldn’t care because you deserve better anyway: Someone who’s not only faithful but sees you for the treasure you are. Any man worth his salt would gladly wait a million years for you if that was what you wanted.”

She looked a little shell-shocked by his statement. But nodded her acceptance, her expression becoming nervous and apologetic.

“I sorry to just dump this on you… I know you probably don’t want to deal with girl issues. I just… I don’t have anyone to talk to about this. Gin will stick up for her brother, everyone else just expected me to end up with Ron, Harry is his best friend and mum is…”

Her voice cracked, and she started to cry in earnest. He moved to hold her closer and she leant into his touch, accepting his nonverbal reassurance that he was right where he wanted to be. She placed her head on his shoulder and he rested his cheek on the top of her head. She relaxed a little in his arms before continuing.

“It’s not like I can talk to my mum about this either. She was always there for me, always knew just what to say and I… I just miss her so much right now. If she were here, she’d tell me to go put my pj’s on, wrap me up in a blanket, make a pot of tea and we’d sit and talk until I felt better…”

‘So that’s what all this is about. I knew there had to be something else. She wouldn’t waste her time being this upset over the Weasel.’he thought.

“Hermione, what happened to your parents?”

“I obliviated them.”

That was not what Draco was expecting at all. Sure, he knew it had to be bad, but he never could have anticipated her response.
“I knew Voldemort was hunting muggle-borns, so I removed all traces of myself and sent them to Australia. They’re not dead; but I’ll never be their daughter again.”

“I never knew. I suspected whatever happened wasn’t pleasant but I’m so sorry you were put in that position, that you had to go through that.”

“I’m learning to cope. Days like today, when I need them most are the hardest; sometimes I forget and start to write or call home only to remember that I have no home, because they’re not there. I have so many unfinished letters tucked away… I’ve called home so many times just to hear our old answering machine with the three of us talking, I can’t stand the fact that I can’t keep a hold on how their voices sound.”

“I won’t lie, knowing helps the rest of this make sense.”

“I know it does. I couldn’t care less what Ron, Lavender, Rita or anyone else says about me, or my prudishness. I just wish I had my Mum to talk about it.”

She looked up at him then with a devastatingly sad smile. His heart was breaking for her, and the cracks were filling with his own self loathing for being part of the reason she was in pain. But her teary smile didn’t falter as she looked at him and he knew she didn't mean for him to take the blame for it.

“Draco, thank you for being here for me.”

“I will always be here, for as long as you want me to be.”

“You’re so amazingly strong Hermione in every way imaginable. However, you’re holding on to a lot of guilt. I’m not going to tell you to let it go, that doesn’t work; but you have to forgive yourself for it someday. Use logic if you must, look at it clinically... Was there any other way to save them at the time? Not likely, so you did the best you could in the circumstances. Live with it. Grow from it. But don’t let it dim your light.”

“Draco, that’s good advice. But how do I take it? Every time I think about them I lose myself in grief and what if’s. It’s a pit of despair so deep there’s no light at the top anymore.”

“I don’t have an answer for that ‘Mione. Grief never leaves us, nor does guilt; you just have to let your life grow around it instead of letting it grow into your life. It’s what I’m trying to do... I’m learning, but it was always a matter of learning to live with what I did or dying; I chose the harder path for the people I had to live for.”

“I guess all I can do is try then.”

She moved to lie down then and seeing how tired she looked he muttered a charm to snuff out the lights and went to get up. Once again, her hand caught his and he halted at the electricity in their contact.

She whispered three words into the darkness; a question, a secret and a prayer.

“Will you stay?”

He would never deny her, could never desert her. He stayed.

oOo
Your comments kudos and feedback have been giving me all the feels and motivation needed to keep this going. So feel free to keep sending them through.

Also being unbetad please excuse any mistakes. I've noted a few already and will go back and fix them soon.

xo Em
It had been one hell of a day for Hermione. Everything had been fine until Parvati dropped the latest copy of Witch Weekly in front of her at lunch. After that things had gone downhill. She took the magazine and had enough sense to go back to her dorm to read it. Curling up in her bed, she hadn’t been too upset seeing Ron moving on; but reading the article had left more than a bitter taste in her mouth.

Their eventual breakup made no difference; finding out he had been with someone else while they were still ‘making it work’ was a betrayal. Every word that followed was a dagger in the back, it hurt to have her private life hung out for public consumption. She had thought he was better than that, but apparently, he was far too caught up with Lav-Lav and the publicity his new relationship had brought to care who he was hurting in the process.

She had little love for liars, cheaters and betrayers. Ron was supposed to be her best friend and he had gone and slandered her to the press. He had more than a few horrid hexes coming his way that much was certain.

There was so much going on in her head, she had picked up a quill to write to her mum. Like every other time before, this led to a breakdown. She pulled her knees into her chest and cried for her
mother; she cried until she had no tears left.

She had dealt with a lot in her short life and she had always had her parents to help her through it. They were with her through all the bullying, the attempts on Harry’s life, Voldemort’s return, the start of the war… Her parents had always been there to confide in and seek support in. losing them left such a hole in her life and her soul, her heart would never heal from it.

On days like this she felt the loss more than usual. Exacerbated by the fact she couldn’t turn to most of her friends for support. She didn’t usually allow herself the luxury of wallowing in her grief, but today she let herself crawl into the warmth of her covers to do just that.

The rest of the day passed and eventually she had stopped crying, instead staring at the canopy of her bed; lacking the energy to blink. Her eyes burned with the strain of it, but she hardly cared. She felt so numb but every time her eyes flicked to the magazine next to her a white-hot rage pulsed through her veins.

Her tears returned but they weren’t for her parents; these tears scorched her cheeks as she thought of every little way to make Ron hurt. Not usually a vengeful person she snapped herself out of such toxic thoughts and was left feeling hollow once again.

That hollowness was replaced by the sickly-sweet voice of her insecurity. She was inundated with a million and one ways for all this to be her fault. Not pretty enough, bad hair, snobby, swotty, bookworm, boring, prude, cold, unfeeling, grieving, unstable, over-emotional, introverted, anxious… her list of failures was much longer than Lavender’s.

She didn’t know how much more time had passed, until there was a knock at the door. There was no need to ask who it was, the portrait wouldn’t let anyone else in. She considered staying quiet and letting him assume she wasn’t there. But after the second knock she realised she didn’t want to be alone.

He entered looking rather like a deer in the headlights. She knew he would have figured something was wrong when she didn’t attend her classes, but he clearly didn’t expect her to let him be the one to comfort her.

She acted on instinct when she pulled him closer to sit beside her. Taking his hand followed much the same reasoning but it had felt so right. He didn’t question her either; he waited for her to tell him and she appreciated that more than anything.

She passed him the magazine and watched him react. She saw his emotions flit across his features as he read the article; disbelief, anger, disgust, confusion and then something she couldn’t quite place. She had almost laughed when he offered to help her hex them. And she saw the flicker of appreciation in his eyes at her protective response. She rather liked it, but was reminded not many had sought to protect him in his life. It made her eyes water again.

Naturally he was confused as to why she would waste her time crying over Ron. Her answer had come tumbling out and she was almost unable to hold her words back. She felt a stab of anxiety discussing her insecurities with him. But he was nothing but a gentleman about it. He didn’t taunt or tease; simply listened and offered his thoughts.

His reaction to her suspicions Ron had cheated on her was more than unexpected; he looked at her, as though he couldn’t believe anyone could do such a thing, and though she couldn’t help but feel embarrassed about admitting to him they hadn’t gone very far, he hadn’t reacted how she thought he would. His response had been so honest, so raw and Innately sweet she had to believe him when he
said that she was worth the wait.

She had been so shocked by his words and the way they burned through every insecurity she had managed to dream up; she tried to backpedal. It was a disaster; Apologising for forcing him to deal with her issues had led to her mentioning her mother and then breaking down in tears again.

She hadn’t wanted to do that in front of him. She had her pride after all and shrinking into a sobbing mess wasn’t doing wonders for it. Yet again he surprised her; he didn’t try to escape after witnessing her outpouring of emotion, he moved closer and let her cry into his embrace. He wasn’t going anywhere, and that was reassurance enough for her to decide to tell him the rest when he asked.

It was the hardest conversation to have, but at least he understood that she wasn’t really affected by the article so much as her own guilt and grief on an unrelated matter. Telling someone she stole memories from her parents to save them had a fifty-fifty chance of severe judgement or extreme pity (she hated both reactions as much as the other). He expressed neither and instead she saw him attempt to take the blame. Through her tears she smiled up at him, as though that might reassure him that she didn’t see it that way.

He smiled back when she thanked him for being there for her and when he stated he would always be there for her, she had to hold back tears once again. His ensuing advice left her with questions for days but his offer to help her learn alongside him gave her exactly the kind of comfort she needed.

Feeling tired she had spared a glance at her clock only to see how late it was. She settled down and he politely got up to leave. Feeling him move away from her felt so unbearable she hadn’t thought twice about stopping him. She didn’t want him to go and she would have been lying if she said her heart didn’t soar when he chose to stay.

She woke the sometime during the night feeling worse for wear. She knew one look in the mirror would revel bloodshot eyes and severe bedhead; but she couldn’t have cared less. It took her a few moments to get her brain working again, in order to process how nice it felt waking up in Draco Malfoy’s arms (even if it was still dark out). He was still asleep and looking adorably rumpled in yesterday’s uniform. she couldn’t help the flutter in the pit of her stomach seeing his expression so serene.

Tucked into his side, her head on his shoulder; he had clearly attempted to position himself in such a way that she wouldn’t feel he was being ungentlemanly. Usually lying on someone the way she was felt uncomfortable and awkward; but they seemed to fit perfectly; like adjoining puzzle pieces.

More awake than she wanted to be, she occupied herself watching the even rise and fall of his chest and traced his features with her eyes. From the blond lashes that brushed the slight swell of his cheeks and his now unfurrowed brow; to the line of his jaw, the curvature of his bottom lip and his perfectly shaped cupid’s bow.

Maybe it was more than a little creepy to be staring at her friend in such a way; but of late she had been seeing the possibility there might be more between them (and not just on her end). She knew that she had truly begun to change the way she perceived him and while being friends was enough, she had hope for something deeper.

Ginny had once said she thought he was rather gorgeous; Hermione hadn’t really seen it at the time. But looking at him now in the dim starlight sneaking through her window; his aristocratic features worked to create a visage that any witch with eyes could see, was more than a little attractive. Funnily enough Hermione couldn’t care less what he looked like; she liked him for his mind; his
wicked sense of humor, his passion toward his interests, the little considerate things he would do for her… The more she tried to list what she liked the more she came to realise she loved the whole package; scars and all.

The last thought she had before drifting back into the abyss sleep provided, was that she hadn’t had a single nightmare with him beside her. She fell asleep smiling at the thought.

oOo

The next time Hermione woke was considerably different. They had slept in.

There was no awkward good morning, no time to debrief the events of the night before in the light of a new day. They were late.

They had missed breakfast but there was still time to get to class without being too tardy. Rushing to get ready had ended up a hilarious affair: She couldn’t manage her hair; he couldn’t find his tie (it was hanging over her lamp). Then they had tripped over each other in their haste to collect their books for the day’s lessons.

She at least had the forethought to grab an apple and throw it to him as he waited for her by the portrait door. Unfortunately, her aim was off, and he hadn’t been paying attention; it hit him square in the side of the head. He looked mildly annoyed but was quickly laughing along with her as she gasped out her apologies.

They managed to make it to herbology in time, though professor Sprout had shot them both disapproving looks for arriving so flustered. The first chance she got, she wrote a note to Draco stating that she wondered what their professor thought they had been up to. On the other side of the table he was attempting to hide his laugh behind his gloves and was failing miserably.

They had lunch together, choosing to sit outside under a warming spell. Finally having a moment of peace, he asked her why she had chosen to open up to him about Ron and her parents.

She couldn’t help but ask if it bothered him that she had. But he reassured her it was merely curiosity. So, she told him outright that it was because she felt he was the only person who would have listened without judging her first. He accepted her answer and they went back to nibbling their sandwiches; but she could tell there was another question burning in his mind, he was just working up the courage to voice it.

A few bites later he did.

“Why did you ask me to stay last night?”

“Because I wanted you to.”

“I think there’s more to it than that. I don’t want to push you, but I need to understand.”

“No, its alright, you deserve the truth… I had two reasons: first, I honestly wanted nothing more than for you to stay. I couldn’t bear being left on my own. I know it was selfish, but I missed simply being close to someone. Not even being held, though that was nice; I missed just sharing space; and you’re the only one I felt comfortable enough to ask.”

"Secondly; I didn’t want to wake up not knowing what was real. Having you there next to me meant that if I dreamed about them I wouldn’t wake up unsure of my reality. Funnily enough, I didn’t have a single nightmare last night. Its been months since I’ve slept so well, even with the potions I have stashed away.”
"It wasn’t selfish, it was human… and I suppose I should thank you, because I didn’t have any nightmares either."

He dropped the topic then and they headed for their next class making small talk about trivial things like homework and the next round of quidditch. But there was a distinct sense that the tectonic plates of their friendship had shifted a little. Just enough to cause a little tremor but not quite earthshaking.

Much later that night, after colliding in the dark; both stuck in a haze of terror following the return of their nightmares, they decided continuing to share a bed wasn’t such a bad idea if it meant actually resting easy. Strangely enough it wasn’t a hard conclusion to come to; both just accepted it and moved on.

She could admit that maybe it was pushing the bounds of platonic, but it was a much-needed reprieve and he was ever the gentleman. They never spoke about it after, meaning neither felt uncomfortable about it; but she could tell that ‘sharing space’ was doing wonders to heal the cracks in his soul as well as her own. Just being close to another person, with no ulterior motive was soothing.

Hermione and Draco had been nightmare free since Monday. Feeling well rested had done wonders for the both of them. He had more colour in his cheeks, she had a bit more pep in her step and both couldn’t help but feel good about helping the other. It was an adjustment, but one that they were both benefiting from.

Not to mention how much stronger their friendship was for it. On Thursday he had overheard her telling Luna that she considered him among her best friends; He had tried to hide his blush and his smile at the title, but she had already seen it. She took pride knowing she had given him a reason to feel happy.

It had taken a few days before the rumour mill of Hogwarts managed to settle down in the wake of Ron and Lavender’s little stunt. Friday evening, she had been hanging out with the snakes in the Head’s common room; when a familiar and very clumsy old owl had crash landed onto the dining table.

Annoyed at having to disrupt the riveting discussion regarding the progress Draco was making on bringing VHS to Hogwarts, she skimmed the letter and when asked, read the letter from Ron aloud.

He made more than a few apologies and expressed how much he wanted to explain. She wasn’t sure if she wanted to listen.

He wanted to meet her in Hogsmeade on Sunday and she had half a mind to turn him down. Oddly enough it was Theo who suggested she at least go down there and give him what for, even if she didn’t want to. So, with the help of the Slytherin trio, she drafted a slightly snarky acceptance letter and sent it off; their promises to send a few hexes Ron’s way followed Errol out the window and into the night.

Knowing she had to see Ron was causing more anxiety than she had anticipated. Ginny and Draco both tried to take her mind off things, but it was no use. She wasn’t sure how she would react and she didn’t like feeling out of control.

Ginny had been rather protective of her around the rest of the student body once she saw the
magazine (Errol had a habit of delivering things late). It had been a strange kind of relief when she had offered to cast a perpetual bat bogey hex on her brother. However, her friend had also been a voice of reason; bringing to her attention that she may not have all the facts. Thinking on it a little more; she knew Ginny was right and she really needed to talk to Ron.

Sunday afternoon Hermione walked down near the shrieking shack to Harry’s spot. Luna, Ginny, Theo and Draco were in the Three Broomsticks if she needed a reason to escape. Expecting to be early she found Ron already there. Almost forgetting herself she went to hug him, but drew back at the last second. She didn’t greet him, wanting this to be over as quickly as possible.

“Explana. Now.”

“No beating around the bush then? ok ...I didn’t do any interview.”

“It sounded like you did, but that’s not the issue.”

“I know how it sounded and some of it was discussed; but not with Rita Skeeter.”

“Ronald, I don’t care about the magazine... Are you really such a doh?”

“Uh…”

“Did you shuck up with Lavender in July or not?”

“Not in the way you're thinking 'Mione. I know it sounded that way, but it didn't go anywhere until you and I ended things.”

“I can’t say I’m not mad. But thank you for being honest. I mean, we knew things weren’t going to work out and I’m glad she makes you happy; but when I thought you had cheated in the end, it cut pretty deep. I would however like to know where Rita got her information from.

“You have every right to be mad 'Mione, and I should have told you about it when we broke things off, but I was a coward. The stuff in that phony interview was Lav ranting about you in Diagon Alley after I said I wanted to visit; she was jealous and being vindictive. Its no wonder Skeeter got a scoop the way Lav was yelling.”

Relief washed over her in waves. Lavender being vindictive was nothing new and as for Rita; well she could spin any tidbit about Hermione into something negative if given the chance. Hermione had always been able to tell when Ron was lying, knowing he was telling the truth allayed most of her anger, making way for logic.

“I might have agreed with some of the things she said about intimacy; you and I both know how awkward it felt to try to be more than friends; but I wouldn’t have gone and told the world about it, and certainly not in such a crass way. I respect you enough not to do that.”

“You made a mistake Ron, we all do sometimes... but I think I have a beetle to put back in a jar and an apology to make for thinking the worst of you before I asked you about it. Lavender might have a hex coming her way though.”

“I know she does; if I didn't love her, I'd do it myself. You don't have to be sorry though. I'm the one that's sorry i should have defended you to her and instead I chose to let her say what she wanted with little thought about who might hear it... by the way, I'll gladly help you put Skeeter in her place if it means seeing you smile.”

Glad to have sorted out their misunderstanding (and place blame where it belonged) she grinned at
him and he tentatively smiled back. They were going to be ok, all things aside.

“C’mon Won-Won, let’s go get a butterbeer and you can see your sister. You might want to stay behind me though, I’ve got offers to hex you coming out of my ears.”

She grabbed his arm and they headed for the Three Broomsticks. She couldn't help being a little annoyed at him for the timing of his relationship, but knowing the circumstances she knew eventually she'd let it go.

She also chose to acknowledge that even if he had done all she had assumed, eventually she would have forgiven him. They were family, and holding onto that was always going to be more important; no matter what life threw at them.

Though she did momentarily wonder when she had started trusting that destructive little voice in her head, telling her to see the worst in people. She decided not to make that mistake again.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

Rita and Lavender absolutely have it coming!! *insert evil laugh here*

Ron maybe just needed a slap up the backside of his head. i also want to say that i don't intend Hermione to come off as blindly forgiving him. but she's known him long enough to know when he's telling the truth and while shes still a bit annoyed at the timing, she understands that its not as big a deal as she thought, considering the facts.

feel free to leave kudos, comments or some feedback, i love hearing from you all :)

sending virtual hugs everyone's way :)

xo Em
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

ok Draco's POV

warnings for language and extreme tooth rotting fluff

Chapter Notes

I'm fighting the airport grumpiness with this chapter. I'm surviving on an hour of sleep and I've had so much coffee my hands are shaking, but I've written some fluff and life is a little bit more ok (I F****** hate flying but it'll be worth it for two weeks of sun and sand in Hawaii!)

I hope you all enjoy this chapter, it's longer than usual but I had a lot to cover enjoy xo Em

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

Sitting in the Three Broomsticks with Ginny, Blaise, Neville and Theo, He couldn't help but worry about her. He tried to tune out their incessant nattering and attempted to focus on watching the door, waiting for her to step through it.

While he enjoyed the company, it was utterly distracting (though he had to admit he would likely remain surprised the Gryffindors had been so welcoming). Not to mention that Weasel's sister was sitting at the table with them, putting a serious dampener on his ability to hex the git if Hermione returned upset.

While he may have suggested she overreacted before seeking the other side of the story, if there was any truth to that article, he would be likely to skip the hex and simply introduce his fist to Weaselbee’s face.

He still couldn’t believe anyone could claim that Hermione was anything less than amazing. She would say; ‘no one is perfect’ but damn if she wasn’t the closest thing to it. Seeing her insecurities laid bare that night had brought up more than a few unpleasant memories, he quickly felt a familiar stab of guilt over being a contributing factor to her development of said insecurities.

He wanted to take back every blasted word, regardless of whether he meant it at the time. He hated that the only thing he could do was apologise. She deserved more than that. Sometimes it was all too easy to forget just how much he had tormented her, their friendship was so easy, so open; he could lose sight of his past in her acceptance.

oOo
After about twenty minutes, he started to worry just a little. To be taking so long meant it was either very good news, or the worst possible news; there wasn’t going to be a middle ground. A flash of unmistakable red hair coming through the door set his teeth on edge, clenching his jaw he waited to catch sight of her to reassure himself she was alright.

She didn’t seem to be too affected (thank goodness). He could tell she had cried at some point (she had that flushed look about her that he knew accompanied tears); but she had her arm looped through Weasley’s and he knew they must have sorted out their issues.

He would be interested to hear what he came up with to placate the lioness who was on the warpath that morning (but perhaps today was not the day to ask). At least he wouldn’t need to feel jealous over such a friendly gesture. regardless of today’s outcome it was very clear that any romantic notions she held were long gone.

Weasley clearly hadn’t spotted him yet, which he supposed was a good thing. As much as he internally threatened to ‘pop the weasel’ he really didn’t fancy meeting someone’s fist either.

He caught Hermione’s eye and offered her a small smile while she ordered drinks. she responded with a shocked expression and he didn’t have to ask her to explain what it meant. Behind her hand she mouthed ‘be nice’ from across the room.

He would do his best to be civil. Draco Malfoy would not be the instigator today… The same couldn’t be said for Weaselbee, who based on the way he was now striding over to their table; clearly hadn’t been informed the snakes were acting as backup.

“The fuck are you doing here ferret!?”

“Having a firewhiskey, whats it look like i’m doing?”

“I can see that, but why are you sitting here!?”

His face turned an ugly shade of red once he noticed the other snakes at the table and Draco saw him bite back another comment. Instead he turned his attention to Neville and Ginny.

“What are you two doing sitting with these prats?”

“Uh, enjoying their company if you must know Ron.”

Draco had to admit he was surprised to hear the notoriously meek Neville pipe up in their defence. but that seemed to set the weasel off even more.

“b-but they’re dea… Slytherins!”

Weasley may have cut himself off but it didn’t make the intended insult sting any less. He truly had no tact.

“And what difference does that make, Ronald. Bilius. Weasley!?“

Weaselbee was certainly in for it, now that Ginny was involved. Draco couldn’t suppress a snort at his middle name though. Bilius? It was a shame he was doing this turning over a new leaf thing; that would have made for a few excellent taunts. ‘Might still come in handy in future though’ he thought smugly.

“‘Mione, did you know they’d be here? Did you know about the company my sister deems acceptable to keep!?”
Hermione looked as though she had accidentally apparated into a war zone. But he could see the fire Weasel’s question lit in her eyes.

“Yes Ron, and I happen to wholeheartedly approve of her keeping company with these gentlemen. Are you also going to suggest that I ought to question keeping company with them too? Because I happen to like spending time with all of them; as does Ginny.”

“Does that answer your question, Ron?”

Draco was well aware he had been told to play nice, so he switched from his usual sarcastic venom to something far worse: Saccharine drawling (a tone he reserved for the people he hated most; like his father).

Ron seemed well aware of the game Draco was playing and stormed out of the tavern with steam coming out of his ears. Hermione didn’t chase him though. She sat down beside Draco with a sad smile and gave him a reassuring pat on his knee.

“If he can’t deal with it, he isn’t welcome anyway.”

‘Mione, if that’s how you want it to be, I’ll accept your decision, but you and I both know you’d be unhappy. So, if you don’t mind I think it’s time the Weasel and I have a heart to heart. Seeing as we’re all so close nowadays.”

Before she could protest, he stood, shot her her trademark smirk and followed Ron out the door.

Catching up with the weasel was easy. Talking to him like a mature adult was going to be the hard part. In hindsight, grabbing an auror-in-training by the arm was a bad idea; Fortunately, his seeker’s reflexes kicked in and he dodged the elbow headed for his face.

“Alright Weasel calm down. I’m not going to kill you”

“Well you are a death eater, so I wouldn’t put it past you.”

“Okay, that’s a fair point I suppose; but you realise I was acquitted right?”

“Doesn’t matter; you’ve got the mark, you should be in Azkaban with your father and the rest of them; Not here making pals and flouncing around Hogsmeade with your Head Boy Badge.”

“Again a fair point. I’m just the big bad Slytherin, death eater who’s managed to con the helpless Gryffindors into liking me and my friends.”

Salazar, this was already fraying his limited patience. He was barely restraining the sarcasm.

“Try looking past the end of your nose Weasel. You might find some things aren’t what they seem.”

“Yeah like you could ever change, Ferret.”

“I can and I have. We all have. Do you honestly think I’d be anywhere near them if I hadn’t? Rub those two brain cells of yours together Weasley and figure it out.”

“Piss off Malfoy, I don’t have to figure it out! It doesn’t change anything.”

“IT CHANGES EVERYTHING!”

Draco’s cool slipped through his fingers, no longer caring about being mature; he decided he was getting through to Weasley one way or another.
“You think you’re the only ones who went through hell?… You need a reality check Weasel! Try living with Voldemort in your fucking house. Or being related to the bitch who carved that slur into your friend’s arm, while being forced to stand there and watch. How about living with yourself after crucioing a muggle born; because it was either torture a stranger or kill your own mother. Are you so blinded by your hate that you can’t see that we didn’t want any part of our parent’s fucking war!?"

“And you know something else Weasley, you fought the war to rid the world of prejudices, but all you’ve done is reversed them. You have become exactly like the person you hate most… Me… And guess what, I pity you; because if you can’t manage to give it up, you’re going to lose the people who matter to you.”

Ron tried to speak but Draco pushed on before he could spit out some denial or other.

“Shut up Weasel, I haven’t finished! You should know ‘Mione sat down after you left and said that if you couldn’t deal with us being around, you wouldn’t be welcome. So don’t bullshit to yourself that you’d never lose them to a bunch of snakes; because we aren’t trying to steal them, they aren’t our property and you haven’t been here to see the progress we have made building bridges over the shitty pasts we’ve shared. You don’t get to come here and attempt to undo that work simply because you haven’t personally witnessed the changes we have all made since the war ended. Changes that have been years in the making for some of us, not months.”

“And before you say anything else. Yes, I did say years; I may have spat out bigoted insults and been a right prat to most of you, but I’ve been questioning those beliefs for a lot longer than you or anyone else may realise.”

“Don’t take this as an olive branch though; this isn’t going to end with us being mates or whatever… I’m only saying this because I don’t want to see Hermione hurt; she’s able to see the good in people, maybe you need to take a page out of her book before you fuck things up, again. I know I am by even considering tolerating you, just to make her happy.”

“Alright Malfoy, now that you’ve finished your little rant, Why do you even care if I fuck up? and since when do you care about Hermione, it was hate at first sight, you against the mudblood as you so loved to call her…”

“Ugh, clearly your ears are just for show… I don’t care if you fuck up, I care if you fuck up and hurt her in the process. As for why, or rather when I started caring about her, all I’ll say is; I was in the middle before I knew I had begun. And I haven’t called her mudblood since my aunt carved up her arm and spilled her very red blood on my drawing room floor.”

“Now you have two choices Weaselpbee; you can leave, or you can walk back to the Broomsticks and play nice with the Slytherins like a mature adult. It’s up to you; but I swear, if you make the wrong choice and you hurt her, I will personally ensure you suffer.”

He didn’t wait for the Weasel’s reply: turning on his heel, he made his way back to for a stiff drink.

It wasn’t easy to play the good guy, he mused.

the majority of the group were at the bar waiting on more drinks, Hermione remained at the table and after he sat down, she shot him a questioning look. He promised to tell her about what happened later; she didn’t press him but rather unexpectedly pecked him on the cheek.

His face burned red and he felt the heat spread from the tips of his ears, right down his neck. She
hadn’t even hesitated and sat looking as calm as ever, as though nothing had happened.

However, it seemed he couldn’t catch a break today. Her little display of affection was so poorly timed, he had to wonder if he was cursed.

Ron stood on the threshold, barely keeping himself together. As much as Draco wanted to rub it in his face, he thought better of it. Hermione hadn’t seemed to notice Weaselbee’s return, but she lit up when he finally managed to switch his brain back on enough to make his presence known.

He sat on the other side of her and gave her a quick side hug. He didn’t say anything to Draco, but he knew the Weasel must have come to his senses enough to see the damage he would have caused if he stayed away.

The rest of the group returned with butterbeer and firewhiskey and Draco wondered if they could feel the tension surrounding himself and the Weasel. Of course the other Slytherins weren’t so keen on him either, but they weren’t in the direct line of fire. He supposed they got off easy; Weasley’s ire was solely directed at him for the moment.

They all sat making awkward small talk until it was time to gather the rest of the student body and head back to the castle. He could handle Weasley any time but honestly he was a little tired of being on the receiving end of his sullen glower. Draco had to wonder how the Weasel might react to the highly effective nightmare treatment he and Hermione had agreed to. Not that he had any intention of mentioning that little fact to anyone.

oOo

Back in their dorm Hermione immediately began questioning him on his interaction with Ron. But not quite in the way he expected. Her questions centered around making sure he was alright (and whether she needed to hex Ron for insulting him).

He told her most of it. Only omitting the more incriminating statements he had made. recounting his interaction with Ron made him realize he had let on more than he would have liked about his feelings, exacerbated by the fact Ron had witnessed the closeness he and Hermione now shared. Funnily enough he thought it might actually work in his favour; if Weaselbee were to see the two of them interacting, it might help lessen any negative reactions to ‘something more’ developing between them. (But that was a long way off, if ever).

Hermione had been more than pleased with the way he put Ron in his place, she didn’t even mind that he had somewhat lost his cool, rather commending him for giving Ron the blunt truth. Once she had been reassured he was more than fine in the face of Weasel’s insults; she grabbed their books off the dining table and curled up on the couch with him.

She didn’t concentrate on the text for long though.

“Hey Draco, why did you go out there to talk to him?”

“Because, I didn’t want you to lose another person because of me.”

He didn’t realize how his comment sounded until he said it, but it was the truth.

“Draco that’s sweet of you to say, but you realize no one I’ve lost has been because of you. You didn’t cast the curses that killed them. I’d never blame you for that.”
“Sure, I know. But still, I didn’t want you to lose him too. As much as I dislike the Ginger Git, you deserve to be happy and I wouldn’t have you sacrifice that.”

“I’m not sacrificing anything for you. Old or new friends, it makes no difference; if he couldn’t move past his misinformed beliefs, I wouldn’t have wanted to be around him anyway. But that wouldn’t have made it your fault; That’s on him.”

“Then you understand why I did something about it. Sure, he wasn’t too pleased to have to sit there and play nice with the death eaters, but I saw the way you smiled when he came back; that made setting my pride aside more than worth it, if it meant you kept smiling like that.”

“You remember when I said you continue to surprise me? Well you’ve done it again and I really can’t thank you enough. I know it must have been hard to take the high road and Merlin knows Ron can be such a prick sometimes…”

“But, you need him in your life. I think I can manage to put up with him if it means you won’t end up resenting me for him leaving you, again.”

“Yes you’re ri… wait, how did you know about that?”

“You talk in your sleep sometimes… I don’t always realise you’re still asleep.”

“Then you must have guessed by now I haven’t quite forgiven him for it?”

“I figured as much”

“It’s the reason we didn’t work out as a couple I think. Despite the lack of spark, I could never quite get over the fact that he abandoned us when the going got tough; guess I just kept waiting for him to do it again… I started picking fights to test him.”

He didn’t really have a response for her statement. But thankfully she decided a change in tone was needed and he didn’t have to worry.

She giggled lightly and he could see she wanted to know more about her subconscious conversational skills, so he recounted a couple of the less serious things she had talked about when her thoughts were unguarded.

“A few nights back, you were going on about how you had to study for a French exam or you’d fail: I tried to reason with you that the school doesn’t even offer French, but you were so adamant about it you started rattling off phrases, so we had a ten-minute conversation in French before you went back to sleep.”

“I spoke French in my sleep? I can’t speak French when I’m awake. Of course you’d be fluent though, you’re Mr. Insufferable-Know-It-All.”

“Guess I’m taking your last name then?”

“Wait, fuck… I didn’t mean it like that”

He tried to laugh off the joke, hoping she wouldn’t pick up on the shred of honesty behind his attempt at humour.

“Ugh no! Then I’d have to call you Granger and that would just get confusing, You’ll always be Malfoy…”
“…So, what else have I said since we started our nightmare treatment?”

“You mostly just hold conversations, only you tend to lack a filter; One time you referred to Potter as the ‘King of the bespectacled dumbasses’ for letting Lockhart attempt to fix his arm second year, I laughed so hard I woke you up. You talk about Weasley every now and then, and sometimes you mention me. But I don’t take advantage of it when you do.”

“I appreciate that… And Harry is the King of bespectacled Dumbasses, nothing has changed there.”

“By the way, I’m sorry if I keep you up, I know how difficult it is for you to sleep.”

“Well considering that I’m not having nightmares all the time, I don’t mind so much. So you wake me up once or twice, it’s still an improvement… besides, it’s cute.”

“I am not cute Mister.”

“Oh you aren’t? Well someone’s told you a lie.”

“Please, I’m too sullen to ever be considered cute.”

“Yes well you manage it anyhow”

“Ugh, you’re impossible.”

“You love me and you know it.”

He smirked at her while she got all flustered. definitely cute.

“you are insufferable, and if you call me cute again, you’ll face my wrath!”

“Still cute; even when you’re threatening me. It was kinda cute in third year too, I would have laughed if you hadn’t followed through.”

‘Shut the fuck up, you’re such a fucking idiot!’ He berated himself.

She plastered on her best frown as she tried not to laugh and promptly dug her toes into his ribs. He jumped when she hit a slightly ticklish spot and the look in her eyes said that this would be the end for him.

That little reaction was the biggest mistake of his life.

She started to grin like the Cheshire cat and put her book down on the coffee table. He didn’t move (even though he knew what was coming: he didn’t really want to).

She sidled up to him, her expression turning doe eyed and innocent looking. He almost flinched when she placed her hands on his sides. It was pure torture waiting for her to do something, but he couldn’t help but smile.

Then she started tickling and he lost it. A little known fact about Draco Malfoy was that he was incredibly ticklish. much to the amusement of his mates, who loved to zap him in the ribs simply to watch him crumble in on himself.

He tried to squirm away from her, but she was relentless. She was laughing so hard tears were streaming down her cheeks as he tried to escape. He begged her for mercy, but she ignored him and kept up the tirade. Merlin this woman knew how to torture him.
Trying not to kick, he somehow ended up halfway off the couch and before he could catch himself, he was pulling them both down to the floor. She stopped the moment she landed on top of him and looked down with concern in her eyes.

“You ok”

“Fine… you?”

He managed to breathe out.

“Yeah I’m fine, I landed on something soft.”

She smiled at him again and he noted how lovely her eyes were when they were only inches away.

Both still catching their breath, neither really noticed how intimately they were tangled; but Draco’s heart was hammering in his chest at the proximity. It wasn’t like they hadn’t been close before, they’d hugged, and once or twice they’d woken up closer than they had been before they fell asleep: But there was something different about the way they were now.

He looked up at her and all he could seem to think about was how soft her lips looked and how much he wanted to know what it would feel like to kiss her. Eyes locked with hers, he wanted desperately to show her what he had been keeping secret all these years, but he lost his nerve. His brain caught up with him and his rationality took over.

‘What if she doesn’t want you to?’

‘What if it’s too soon and you ruin everything?’

‘What if she doesn’t like you that way?’

‘What if...’

‘What if...’

‘What if... ‘

‘Fuck.’

oOo

Chapter End Notes

SOOO CLOSE!!! but i like to torture myself and the people following this - i apologise profusely ( i promise its coming, i just wanna drag it out :)

feel free to leave a comment with some feedback, or a kudos, they give me all the feels :)

xo Em
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

no warnings for this one - unless you need one for copious fluff :)

Chapter Notes

back with hermione's pov
im sorry for not posting in a while ive been trying to get this done for days now but with my mind on a million things it just didnt happen as fast as i wanted it to

im not going to say anything too much on plot for this chapter, but i hope everyone enjoys it :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

Hermione couldn’t believe the turn the afternoon had taken. Emotions were running high it seemed. She had fretted over her meeting with Ron all morning (poor Draco had to listen to her droning on about it for a good hour) then she had dealt with Ron, come to terms with that horrid article and redirected her anger toward Lavender bloody brown and Rita Fucking Skeeter. All in a mornings work.

Through all that drama, she hadn’t thought about the fact taking Ron back to the Broomsticks would be putting him face to face with Draco. She had been so nervous she had to stop her hands from shaking (once she realised of course). Just when she had thought the worst was going to happen, Draco had stepped in and saved the day.

She had never been more proud of him than in that moment. He was willing to set aside his differences and attempt to talk sense into Ron, when even she had practically given up. If there was ever a moment to admit to herself that there was something more blossoming between them, now was the time. Seeing Draco come full circle had her heart singing and her eyes watering. She never could have anticipated it.

She didn’t blame Ron for reacting the way he did. She had braced for impact after locking eyes with an equally panicked Draco; what really tried her patience with him, was the fact he tried to question their sanity after refusing to accept the evidence the Slytherins had changed.

She had been heartbroken staring at his back as he walked away again. She could only give so many chances if he decided not to come around. The sting of his abandonment hadn’t gone unnoticed. After Draco left to speak with his nemesis and her best friend, Theo and Blaise went straight into care mode. It wasn’t like she was exuding sadness or putting on a big show; they just knew to comfort her. ‘If only Ron could see this side of them.’ She thought.
Draco came back some time later, looking a little flustered. She had to wonder what went down. She wished she had a way to properly thank him. He had put her feelings before his own; and whether it went poorly or perfectly she appreciated the gravity of such a gesture. If she hadn’t pressed a kiss to his cheek, she likely would have snogged him then and there. (Merlin, did she ever want to!) She could have done it again when Ron wandered back into the pub. Whatever Draco had said to him must have hit home and she appreciated it more than he knew.

The group managed to get through a very awkward afternoon relatively peacefully, all things considered. Draco had been charming, Blaise and Theo on their best worst behaviour, telling bawdy jokes in an attempt to ease the growing tension.

They had parted with minimal fussing and she and Draco headed back to their dorm.

Then things had really got interesting. She wasn’t quite sure when their banter had turned to flirting. It reminded her of what that ‘Justice Potter Stewart’ fellow said... and; like porn, she knew it when she saw it... or heard it in this case. She laughed a little at her own double entendre.

She wasn’t quite sure how to deal with this subtle change, or the fact that she had so blatantly flirted back. She had been trying to stop herself crossing that line for weeks and here she was breaking her own rules.

Sweet Merlin she was further down the rabbit hole than she realised. But honestly she didn’t mind, it seemed the object of her pining was following closely behind her, if she had read the signs right.

There were so many parts of the afternoon that required analysis:

First, there was his off handed comment regarding his wish to see her happy no matter what: she had been rather caught off guard when he had willingly sacrificed his pride in order to salvage her friendship with Ron. His reason was heart-breaking. Blaming himself for her losses as though he had done the deeds himself. He had been so raw and honest (and certainly not trying to draw attention to his own pain in doing so), he was simply putting her needs before his own. Not many people would do that. It proved how much he really cared about her.

Second, the talking in her sleep thing: Good Godric, that was an embarrassing development. She’d had no idea (Ron and Harry never mentioned anything about it from their time on the run) but the way Draco had anticipated that the lack of control would cause her distress (and his attempt to remedy it) caused her heart to swell that little bit more.

He had made her laugh, put her mind at ease and reassured her he never took advantage of her inability to silence her innermost thoughts. She almost didn’t notice that easing her mind was his exact intent.

If she had to pinpoint when the mood had shifted. That was it… Then he had gone and called her cute and she had almost melted into the lounge with an unbecomingly girly giggle. However, her reaction had been worthy of Ginny’s best flirting techniques, while being perfectly tailored for the boy she was attempting to flirt with. ‘Godric help me, I’m bad at this’ she thought.

He hadn’t seemed to mind though. He was rather cheesy himself.

Discovering he was ticklish had been an unexpected bonus. She had been tempted to throw his ‘cute’ back at him when he had started laughing in earnest. It was a sound she hadn’t been accustomed to but had quickly become addicted to. Seeing him drop his guard to enjoy a moment of
fun (even if he was begging for mercy) was so incredibly sweet she couldn’t help but laugh along with him. It felt like they had gone back in time, before the war and the nightmares; when smiles and laughter came easier.

Sweet Circe, she loved his smile too. Unbridled joy and warmth emanated within her when he looked at her like that. She had been so side-tracked watching him, that there was nothing she could do to stop them tumbling off the couch.

They had made quite the thump and she worried he might have hurt himself, but the way he was looking at her made her heart stop. Pressed against him, she could feel his warmth radiating into her skin. He often referred to himself as a snake, but he was far from being cold blooded, he was fire.

She didn’t feel embarrassed about being so close; so tangled up with him. It felt natural; and they were so close, she would just have to lean in the tiniest bit to find out if his lips held the answers she was so desperately seeking.

He was staring back at her as though he was calculating his next move, the slightest tinge of apprehension marred his features. There was still a chance the moment wouldn’t escape them but he had sighed and rested his head against the stone floor, leaving her rejected.

Wanting to escape the awkwardness of her embarrassing oversight, she moved to get up. Placing a hand on his chest to steady herself, he caught her and pulled her down into his embrace before she could attempt to push herself up.

“‘Mione, please don’t go. Just... stay a little longer.”

Well that didn’t quite sound like the rejection she had expected. She stayed and hoped he had more to say. His next statement came out in a rush of words, she only just managed to catch them.

“I’ve got the telly all fixed up; With all the Weasley dramatics going on it didn’t seem appropriate to mention it and then it completely slipped my mind. But do you... um, maybe want to comewithmetotheroomofrequirementtostestitout? Maybe after class tomorrow?”

She stared up at him from where he was tucked into his side. She knew the expression on her face gave away her utter surprise. She was almost tempted to make him repeat himself, under the guise of not understanding what he said; in reality she just wanted to hear him ask her again (but the second time wouldn’t have been as wonderfully flustered, so she refrained). She had heard every word, but her brain translated it simply as ‘come on a date with me.’

\[\text{oOo}\]

This time around, she was going to be sure there were no mixed signals. She decided she was going to be clear and direct about asking what his intentions were… It ended up being the dumbest idea she ever had. She couldn’t even manage to form a coherent sentence. She ended up blushing and stringing together some nonsensical babble about what snacks they would need; before running off down the hall in a nervous haze.

Why did it have to be so bloody hard to just ask if he thought it was a date? The possibility of misreading the situation again left her feeling so anxious she wondered if she would spontaneously combust with the strain of it. She had wanted to kiss him, so bloody badly; but the hesitant look on his face had left her more insecure than she had thought possible.

Hermione wasn’t usually bothered by this type of thing; the last time she let a boy bring her down was the Yule Ball fiasco. But this time around she knew it would sting far more than last time; there was no room for things to go sideways. It was either all in or all out and she desperately wanted to be
all in.

She wondered if this was how Elizabeth Bennett would have felt coming to terms with her feelings for Darcy. She found it endlessly amusing having caught Draco reading that tale a few weeks ago, considering the similarities it bore to their own relationship.

They had come such a long way in their few short months back at Hogwarts and he was in so many ways similar to Darcy; having finally been able to let go of his prejudices and let her in, she had come to see him for the man he had become, not the boy he once was. Once she had seen the truth, she found herself falling faster than she had thought possible; her feelings delving leagues deeper than her initial ‘interest’ in Draco Malfoy.

She didn’t want to be the one to mess things up if he wasn’t on the same page. But making the first move was going to be a risk. Considering she couldn’t let her words express her feelings, she decided to continue what would have happened the previous afternoon and catch his reaction then.

Evening fell over the castle and Hermione couldn’t help but notice her nerves fluttering about like billywigs in her chest.

Making the journey up to the seventh floor she tried to talk herself into what she was planning to do. Of course the timing would have to be right, but if everything fell into place; this was the night she was going to take charge of her feelings and actually deal with the consequences of having them, good or bad (though most likely embarrassing).

She reached the door and it opened for her. Stepping inside she was struck by the delicious aroma of caramel popcorn and ‘wait is that pizza?’

“Draco, how did you manage to get pizza here? Please tell me you didn’t recruit the house elves?”

She heard his reply from the other side of the lounge, where there was a television hooked up to some kind of strange device he was fiddling with.

“Mph cors noh”

“Come again?”

looking back at him she saw him take a screwdriver out of his mouth before he reattempted his reply.

“I said; Of course not… but it was a pain to organise delivery out here. Poor muggle was positively confused until I paid him.”

His ensuing expression told her he had likely miscalculated just how much he had given the delivery driver; She barked out a laugh at the sheer absurdity of him ordering pizza. She had to wonder if he had thought to just apparate to Muggle London for it and apparate back. The look on his face when she mentioned it told her he did not and she burst into another fit of giggles.

He finished his tinkering and proceeded to pull a few shrunken VHS covers out of his pocket. He held them out to her and asked for her preference once they were resized.

clearly he had an eye for classics; The Princess Bride, The Wizard of Oz and It’s a Wonderful Life being the first three he passed her. He then proceeded to draw out a few others; but she already had her choice:
Her parents had started the tradition of watching ‘It’s a Wonderful Life’ long before she had been born. It was more than just a Christmas tradition, they all loved the film so much they watched it more than a few times each year. With her parents now so far out of her reach, she wanted to keep them close somehow, even if it was through a small tradition.

She passed the cover to him and the corners of his mouth quirked up into a knowing smile. He put it in and returned to his place beside her. They both bounced around on the couch with excitement when the charmed T.V. came to life with the opening notes of Frank Capra’s masterpiece.

“I can’t believe you actually got this thing to work”

“I know, me either. But the other day it clicked that if we can charm radios; this was more than possible, I just had to amend the technology and the spell enough to allow the castle to overlook it. After that it wasn’t so hard to charm and connect a power source… now hush, the movie’s starting.”

They sat eating popcorn and pizza; engrossed in the story of George Bailey. She hadn’t told him what the film meant to her yet, but perhaps her hurried movements to brush away a tear or two clued him in.

She sat comfortably on the newly transfigured lounge with his head resting against her thigh: Every now and then she would press a piece of popcorn against his lips for him to eat; smirking playfully when the caramel caused them to stick.

She felt him laugh as George and Mary fell into the pool. She had to stop herself from singing along when the characters on screen were; but when she caught Draco quietly humming the melody, she belted out the tune unashamedly until he joined in.

He held her hand through most of the movie, reaching up to toy with her fingers. His grip tightened a little when George decided to end his life and the pressure increased again when he chased after the version of Mary who never married him. by the time the film ended she was keeping him in place on the couch with her body slotted in behind him.

They cried together when George returned to his own life and found Zu-Zu’s petals. Laughing at their own emotions through the tears she felt that familiar tug in her heart again. He clearly loved this film as much as she did; it was hard not to. After the movie ended, she explained about her family’s tradition.

“Why didn’t you tell me before? I wouldn’t have put you through watching it if I’d known.”

“I wanted to watch it, I’m actually glad you had it. I wanted to share our tradition with you.”

“I’ve never been a part of someone else’s traditions before. The ones I had weren’t all that great to begin with; thank you for letting me in on one of yours.”

“You don’t need to thank me. I should be the one doing that; You’ve gone to so much trouble to set this all up and you unwittingly gave me my first untainted and happy recollection of my parents. I can’t thank you enough.”

Considering he had turned to look up at her, she moved her free hand and brought it to his cheek. Tracking his cheekbone with her thumb, she watched relief flood his features as his eyes fluttered shut and he relaxed into her touch. His skin was soft and she could see the growing blush tinting his pale skin.

Plucking up her Gryffindor courage she decided it was now or never. She was determined to get her answers from the night before.
His eyes were still closed so she knew he wouldn’t be aware of her leaning down. She couldn’t help but hesitate a little, her nerves setting in. Still caressing his cheek in an attempt to keep him distracted while she pulled herself together; she pressed her lips ever so gently to his.

She felt his surprise and held herself steady. It was chaste, but she never wanted to stop doing this with him. She smiled against him when he began to kiss her back. His brain obviously managing to switch back on in light of the shock. It was gentle and soft and wonderful; he shifted a little to hold her closer, and she knew it was cliché; but he felt like coming home.

She didn’t need fireworks or overzealous passion, her heart didn’t beat wildly in her chest, or skip a beat for that matter… Kissing him was as natural as breathing and she didn’t want all those ridiculous reactions anyway; she wanted their instinctive rhythm and the steady beating of his heart keeping time with her own.

It didn’t mean there was a lack of spark or passion between them, far from it. It meant they already had something deeper; two halves of the same whole finally melding together. Starting off slow and sweet, they didn’t need to come up for air for some time. But they wouldn’t be them if things didn’t gradually heat up.

The tape had been long forgotten until those annoying colour bars showed up and began whining for attention. Unable to stand the annoying tone, he reluctantly pulled away and went to remove it. She waited and after a quick tidy up they headed back to their dorm hand in hand, much happier than when they had entered.

With more than a few stops to snog in alcoves along the way; it was a feat they made it back detention free. Kissing and mild heavy petting aside, he remained a perfect gentleman; he knew where the line was and he clearly didn’t intend to cross it so soon. His touches still sent tingles shooting up her spine, the way he touched and kissed her was so reverent she felt like the only person left on earth.

He was also incredibly cheesy. They tumbled through the portrait door and before she had the chance to pull him down to her, he cupped her face and locked eyes with her.

“Seems my next project will have to be finding a spell to lasso the moon.”

She laughed and reached up on her tiptoes to kiss his cheek… She could be quite corny herself but would never miss an opportunity to tease him; she whispered in his ear:

“You’re pale enough to pass and besides I’d much rather have you”

He choked on his laugh when he caught her little innuendo and she doubled over in fits of giggles.

“I try to be romantic and you tease me, you really are one cruel witch!”

“Well I can’t help it when you just walk right into it; Mr. Moonburn”

“Fine, I concede; you win.”

“What’s the prize for winning then?”

“I was hoping you were going to ask that.”

His next kiss was far from sweet and gentle. It was dominating and all encompassing. Fire causes ice to melt and she had to wonder, based on both their reactions to each other; which of them was which?
feel free to drop me a line, a kudos or leave some feedback (or questions). im still on holidays so i will do my best to get back to you asap and will hopefully get a new chapter up very soon :)  
xo Em
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

I'M BAAAAACCCKKK !! I'm sorry to have left you all hanging so long, the last week of a holiday always seems to be the busiest. but I'm back on schedule (well sort of) and typing away :)

No warnings for this one (I know I put this up every time but I promise there will be a need for them eventually)

Chapter Notes

Draco's pov this time, getting into some super cute feels re: these two idiots actually snogging *sings* Aaatt Laaaassttt :) 

But of course i wouldn't be me if i didn't throw a little angst into the mix -

Also to explain why for a slow burn they talk so god damn much about their feelings; I'm going all out to write this as a healthy, progressing relationship; really focusing on the friends to lovers bit and fleshing it out. its absolutely characterised by epic oversharing for the purpose of communicating effectively with each other.

I'm still throwing in angst and issues but I honestly think if Hermione can overcome the crap he's put her through in the past, she sure as hell isn't going to accept him being all mopey because he decides he doesn't deserve her without getting her opinion.

(I'm also going to set myself the challenge of finding relevant and silly nicknames for draco, because I'm still feeling super proud of Mr. Moonburn and I wanna keep that vibe going.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

Draco had planned for every possible disaster their move night could bring. Ranging from the Room not cooperating, to the T.V. spontaneouslycombusting. He hadn’t counted on how amazing the opposite of his ruminations felt.

From his spot on the couch, her hand on his cheek; he hadn’t expected her to do anything else, he was too busy worrying over the possibility of upsetting her. It took him a few moments to understand what was happening; her lips against his felt like the softest silk, or maybe the down on a new quill… he didn’t much care to continue the thought process: Hermione was kissing him and everything in the world felt right; he felt whole (stupidly cliché as it sounded).

He suffered a momentary bout of nerves and tried to stop the inevitable tense that usually followed; he didn’t want to mess up. Rumors went around the school of his prowess, but he was far from the
Casanova his peers made him out to be. not one to contradict them; the truth was, he didn’t want to let on he was slightly inexperienced (between the war, his mission in sixth year and all the rest there hadn’t been much time for philandering). Managing to keep his head, he made sure to be respectful while revelling in having her so wonderfully close.

Experiencing this side of her had him comparing her to the sea, when he had the capacity mull things over. It wasn’t made in the usual sense where some starry-eyed fool compares it to someone’s eyes (besides, hers were the loveliest brown). His notion ran far deeper than the superficial.

She was beautiful, taunting, tempting and unpredictable; he would go to her willingly and gladly drown in her wild currents. The sea might seem fickle and inconsistent but, the sea is the most predictable entity, in that it is unpredictable. It could be formidable, dangerous and unforgiving and at the same time; gentle, nurturing and sustaining: and despite being ever-changing, loyal to those existing alongside her, providing what they needed most.

He had to wonder if there was some deity, somewhere, favouring him enough to allow this to happen. He couldn’t help but feel that she deserved so much better; being hyperaware of the consequences she would face because of what was growing between them, he wanted nothing more than to save her from the tarnish his reputation would bring. But he was also innately selfish; he wanted her more than anything and letting her go without fighting for her would go against his very constitution.

Not that he had ever expected to actually gain her affections. They had developed a strong friendship, though most days he would wake and wonder if he had dreamt it all; considering the numerous reasons she had to never deign to speak to him, he was happy accepting whatever she was willing to give. It was something he considered often and was now a blissfully moot point.

The shift in their relationship was surprisingly easy to adjust to. It remained unspoken that both wanted to keep things between them for the time-being, simply because it was nice to have something of their own, with no outside influences or opinions to burst the bubble of their budding romance.

He hadn’t thought she had felt the same way he did, but in the weeks that followed what he realised was actually their first date (he hadn’t defined it on the off chance he scared her off), they found themselves slipping into easy shows of affection and purposefully chaste intimacy. Taking things slow meant he hadn’t had to deal with the awkward truth of the rumours spread about him; though things remained instinctive between them, neither felt rushed or unwanted; he knew the discussion regarding his reputation would be for another day. (but it had made him somewhat conversationally distant as he tried to avoid it).

It seemed they were somewhat unwilling to discuss many things to do with their changed relationship. Their ‘nightmare treatment’ being high on his list of ‘boundaries he wasn’t sure of’. His own insecurities left him wracked with anxiety as he tried to make sure he didn’t lose her to his own stupidity. As often as he had to remind himself that he hadn’t dreamt every last bit of affection he had been afforded since their date, he didn’t want to destroy the one good thing to ever happen to him by not ensuring she was on the same page.

Lying on the couch together after a day of hard classes seemed an excellent time to bring it up though.

“‘Mione?”
She stirred a little from where she was curled up against him and flicked him a glare worthy of her
annoyance at being woken; a rather fine impression of a cat if he was honest.

“Sorry, bad timing. I had something on my mind and it couldn’t wait.”

“Hm, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong, per se… I just wanted to ask… oh merlin why is this so bloody difficult, this went better in my head… I want to know what you’re comfortable with when it comes to being around me.”

Like a band-aid… he hadn’t quite blurted out what he was thinking but it was damn near close.

“Oh, well that’s nothing to be so worried about, we can figure it out as we go.”

He tried to hide the emotions flicking across his face, but she caught it and he sighed as he watched the wheels in her mind turn to figure out why he was so agitated.

“Why would you be so… oh…”

She put a hand on his cheek and forced his eyes to meet hers. She smiled at him and he wondered for a second if she was going to laugh at him for being such a bloody Hufflepuff.

“You’re not going to mess things up as long as you continue to do wonderful things, like asking me to set boundaries.”

She kissed him soundly, her hands holding him in place as she gently brushed his cheekbones with her thumbs. Not that she needed to hold him steady, he wouldn’t dream of pulling away considering how keenly he felt the loss of her when she eventually did.

“But I don’t want t…”

She cut him off before he could say anything else, with a glint of resolve in her eye that made his heart melt a little; even if he was a little afraid of what it meant.

“Que sera sera, Draco.”

“What do you mean?”

“It means…”

“No, I know what it means… But how can you be so sure I won’t ruin this; after everything I’ve put you through? This is worlds apart from being friends and I don’t think I could stand seeing you resent me some day, regardless of how much I’d deserve it.”

“It’s barely been two weeks since… ugh, are we seriously arguing about this? Fine, listen up buttercup… You need to accept that I’ve come to terms with our past and moved on from it. You want me to yell and scream and tell you how much every little insult cut me to the core, that I hate you for it? Tough shit, I’m not going to do that; because I don’t hate you, nor do I feel you need to be yelled at for what you have already made amends for, you berate yourself enough as it is. Do you think I don’t see who you have become since you sent me that letter? Merlin’s beard, you had me going for a while wondering if it was some elaborate trick; but once I opened my eyes, I saw how hard you were trying to change… it still made me nervous, but we figured things out and look where we are now. I’ll gladly be the first to admit I never would have expected to end up here and I know you think you don’t deserve it, but I have to disagree. Anyone who works as hard as you do to put kindness back into the world deserves a chance. you just have to be brave enough to accept it.”
He was speechless. After all what was there to say? He felt guilty for forcing her to put his mind at ease; but once his thoughts turned him against himself; a small thing like boundaries became a big thing about his insecurities and self-loathing. He would continue to find it hard to believe her; but made a point to commit her words to memory in the hopes of using them to chase away the shadows of his own self doubt (should they catch up to him again anytime soon).

After her passionate speech she curled into his side and held him tightly. In the privacy of their common room he set his emotions free; for the first time in Salazar knew how long, hot tears slid down his face and one or two he didn’t catch in time glistened among Hermione’s wild curls. He returned her embrace just as fervently and he realised she was crying too. Anxiety stabbed through him at the thought of upsetting her, but she seemed content, so he tried not to worry about it too much; ‘what will be will be’ indeed.

He had no idea how long they had stayed holding each other on the chaise. They had remained silent, but he wanted to be sure she was alright; being exposed to his unfiltered, self-hating thoughts wasn’t something he thought she would walk away from unaffected. He went for the ‘apologise before asking’ method. At least this time he knew she was awake.

“I’m sorry you had to deal with all that.”

“Don’t be. It speaks volumes that you were willing to be vulnerable enough to bring it up.”

“I see that, but I can’t help but feel that someday I’ll wake up and this will all have been some wonderful dream I concocted to keep myself sane… Or worse, that it was real, but I do or say the wrong thing; only to lose you anyway. If I can’t manage to imagine how painful it would be to lose your friendship, I can’t bear to think what I would do if I managed to attain and lose your love.”

“So, when you feel like that, talk to me about it, let me ground you. I know things are new and believe me when I say it’s an adjustment for me too; but doing what you are now is how you work through it. Doesn’t matter how we define the way we exist with each other; I’m here for you and I trust that you’re here for me. And if you don’t believe me then you’ll just have to let me prove it.”

“I think I can manage that. It won’t be my first instinct and Merlin knows I’ll let you down more times than you can count by being stubborn; but I promise I’ll try.”

“That’s all I ask then…”

She sat up and offered a hand to pull him up. Snuffing out the lights, he followed her down her corridor, she opened her door and pushed him in before her. He hadn’t ever bothered to think that friends sharing a bed to chase off night terrors was out of the ordinary, but in all honesty, he didn’t care, (and he certainly wasn’t as worried about ‘whatever the hell they were now’ continuing the practice either). His mind at ease over his insecurities, he felt like tonight might be the first time he could sleep beside her and not fall prey to his fears.

Things settled somewhat after that night. Every time they cleared the air it was another step forward. Moving slow naturally had its disadvantages, but it went unsaid that what they had couldn’t be rushed. They needed time to deal with the issues of their past to have any hope of building a strong foundation for their future. Working things out physically was mutually acknowledged to be one hell of a bad idea, for the time being (though certainly not something they weren’t looking forward to).
It was a week until Yule and cheer spread through the castle like wildfire; lit the moment the castle had been decorated, the castle was abuzz with activity as the students prepared for the festivities and new beginnings the end of the year offered.

Though Draco was still getting used to being anything more than stoic in public, even he had fallen victim to the merriment of the season (though he had yet to pluck up the courage to ask Hermione what her plans were for the holidays, which was causing no small measure of anxiety).

Blaise and Theo had hauled the two heads, most of the Gryffindors and one Ravenclaw outside for a good old-fashioned snowball fight.

Reclaiming their youth after the war seemed to be easier to manage in winter. There were many more opportunities for mischief, and now they had dragged the rest of their new friends into their joyful scheming. While he had scoffed at the idea of inter-house unity, the evidence for its positive effects were right before him.

Blaise was looking happier than he had in weeks (his mother married husband number eight recently and it seemed his new stepfather was shaping up to be a right arsehole), Theo was chasing after Luna like a lovesick puppy trying to shove a snowball down the back of her shirt. Ginny was making snow angels with Neville, and as for himself and Hermione, they were engaged in a life and death game of tag that would likely end with them rolling about in the snow wracked with fits of laughter.

It was the kind of morning that was made for the pensive. Though the group would settle for Luna’s incessant picture taking. For Draco it was free and fun and for the first time in a long time, he actually felt that warm sense of belonging. Maybe that was supposed to be the magic of Christmas?

The antics of the morning drew out into the subdued company of afternoon. But it seemed there would never be a truly unmarred moment of joy, when an unfamiliar owl settled next to Draco and presented him with a letter he had dreaded receiving. It took less than a second to recognise his Father’s handwriting.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

feel free to say hi, leave some feedback or just drop a kudos. i literally live for the fact there are people out there reading this and i wanna know if you like it or if you have any suggestions on how i can make it better.

till next time

xo Em
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

No warnings for this chapter, but it is a little heavy and angstier than usual.

Chapter Notes

I spy with my little eye something beginning with P... oh look its plot!

This has been a little directionless the last few chapters and heavily focused on starting their relationship off right. Now that I've done the groundwork (and time jumped a month), I can finally get into the nitty-gritty of things.

Also, I am aware this chapter leaves a few questions that need answering- I needed to answer them while in Draco's POV, so they will all be covered next chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hermione eyed the suspicious owl as it landed next to Draco. She wasn’t the only one watching, but she was perhaps the only person, aside from Draco who felt the foreboding sense of dread the owl carried in its wake.

She watched his expression from the corner of her eye. Not wanting to alert him to her growing concern, she kept her head resting on his shoulder. He reached for what the owl was delivering and quicker than she could blink he was halfway across the courtyard.

He didn’t make it much further and she watched him stagger and fall to his knees just shy of the archway. He’d clearly had the sense to throw up a silencing charm, she watched him scream silently at the sky before dropping his head into his hands. Not knowing what to do, but not wanting to leave him on his own, she walked over slowly and let him know she was approaching, she placed a hand on his shoulder and sat cross-legged next to his kneeling form.

The letter was crumpled in his hand, pressed against his face; still unopened. She didn’t have to ask why he was so affected or how he knew who had sent it. The flash of elegant script peeking through the creases was enough to tell her Lucius Malfoy had contacted his reluctant heir.

She chanced a glance back over at their group and saw they had all moved on, bar Blaise and Theo. She was glad they had stayed. This wasn’t something she could handle by herself and Draco was going to need their understanding more than he would need her.

It took him a minute but eventually, he came back to himself enough to realise she was there. She knew his pride would take a colossal hit at being seen so broken, but she hardly thought he was aware enough of his surroundings to care. He didn’t speak, didn’t look at her; he just reached out and took her hand. She felt a sharp pain in her chest seeing the way he crumpled in on himself once he
took his hands away from his face.

Head hung, he stood and pulled her up with him. She hadn’t been expecting it and followed him up rather ungracefully as she tried to untangle herself. Blaise and Theo watched on and she could tell that as much as they wanted to intervene and offer their support, they were letting Draco decide what he needed. She felt a pang of guilt as Draco sent them a nod to dismiss them. He still hadn’t said a word, but her hand was still clasped tightly in his and he took the lead in heading to the privacy of their common room.

She had to marvel at the way a wonderful day could be ruined so spectacularly.

oOo

Reaching their dorm signalled the end of his emotional restraint and strength. If this was his reaction to handwriting alone, it didn’t bear thinking about how he would deal with the content of the letter. She pried the parchment from his hand and supported him as he wobbled over to an armchair where he sat staring blankly ahead.

She knew he was in shock, maybe having a panic attack as well (if that was at all possible). She grabbed a blanket and wrapped it gently around him and quickly set a spell in motion for tea with honey; in the hopes of plying him with sugar (she also accioed a bar of chocolate just in case).

She levitated one of their dining chairs to sit in front of him and took her place. She had seen some truly horrifying things in her short life but watching a person break (particularly someone she cared about) was perhaps the worst.

She tentatively handed the letter to him and he looked at it as though it would burn him if he touched it. A reassuring pat on the knee and he accepted it, but he didn’t break the seal.

“You have to open it sometime. Or you can burn it; it’s up to you.”

He spoke for the first time since the owl landed. His voice was ragged and scratchy, she could see the effort it took for his vocal chords to form sound after such violent use earlier.

“He shouldn’t have been able to send me this, do you understand what that means? he was forbidden to contact me and now... I-I don’t even have to read it to know what it says, but Circe knows I don’t want to risk ignoring it...”

“And do you know what’s funny? All this started with a letter; did you ask yourself the same question when I sent it to you? I’ve often wondered. Now instead of being able to enjoy what we managed to build in four months, I’m wondering if I’m going to lose it all before I had the chance to see how it turned out.”

She took his hand to offer some small comfort, but she knew it was a drop in the ocean compared to what he was going through. There were no discernible words she could employ to stave off the pit of fear and insecurity he was falling into.

He looked down at the pristine white parchment in his had and she could see the want for pure destruction in his eyes; something she hadn’t seen since before the war and had certainly seen once or twice when he was at his cruelest. (little had she known that it wasn’t directed at her, but at his father for forcing his hand). It was a vicious determination that sent shivers down her spine.

Considering Draco avoided anything that even smelled of his father, she was smart enough to figure out that unless he was free, Lucius Malfoy would not have been able to send this letter. Not to mention the lack of chatter about the school on a Saturday morning on the subject, she had to assume
the papers informing the wizarding public hadn’t been released yet. That worried her; if Lucius was able to move so quickly, he had to have a network already set up; she had no doubt that if he was found, the Aurors would be kicking open the proverbial hornet’s nest.

Returning her attention to the letter she saw that Draco had picked open the seal while she had been distracted. The ensuing and all too familiar sound of parchment sliding out of an envelope was usually something that evoked joy; it was jarring to feel the opposite.

Draco read aloud and despite the anxiety, worry and adrenaline coursing through her, she couldn’t help but feel glad he trusted her enough to include her.

Draco,

As I was so kindly informed by my captors, you requested I be forbidden from contacting you after my sentencing; apparently, you avoid every mention of me as though I never existed. Had you been paying attention instead of lulling yourself into a false sense of security, you would have heard that with the assistance of Theodore’s father and a few of our most loyal supporters, I have escaped. Do not delude yourself into thinking you are safe within the castle walls, you cannot remain there forever, and you can rest assured I am coming for you. When I am through with you there will be no room for the tolerant sentiments you have chosen to believe. You will live up to the mark on your arm regardless of the Dark Lord’s demise. I expected better of my only heir.

Your mother has regrettably been taken out of my reach by the Ministry, though I am sure I can persuade you to give her up. After all, my eyes and ears tell me you have attachments I can now exploit. I expect us to be a family again very soon.

Speaking of attachments, you had better watch the mudblood, I have a bone to pick with her and if I get my hands on her, I will be certain to ensure you have a front row seat to her sanguinary demise. I hear you are rather besotted by her, I will take great pleasure in reminding you of her place in the hierarchy we fought so hard to preserve during the war.

You may take your chances trusting the ministry with your protection, or turn to that old fool McGonagall, but trust me when I say that I will not allow my only son to continue such folly. Should you choose to return to your true family, I will not ask questions. Continue to defy me and be reminded of how much I enjoy seeing you come to consequence.

oOo

There had been no signature at the bottom, there was no need, she could hear the elder Malfoy’s saccharine drawl as though he had taken Draco’s voice and used it as his own. Panic rose as she realised the targets she and her friends had lived with on their backs had returned. She slipped into the kitchen and sent a patronus carrying a coded warning to both Harry and Ron, they may already be aware but she couldn’t live with herself if she didn’t make sure.

Draco was a certifiable mess; but what could she even begin to say to make this alright? He couldn’t go home; his mother was likely in a ministry cell (what the ministry termed protective custody) and the castle clearly wasn’t safe for them either (she had a pretty good idea who Lucius was using to glean information from inside the castle and she truly wished she had hit harder if her hunch was anything to go by).

Just when she had thought she might have a shot at a peaceful year… No, she wouldn’t go there. She would keep herself and Draco safe and fortunately, she already had an idea how to do it. It would have to wait until tomorrow. For now, there were far more pressing matters to attend to.
Hermione had been alongside many experiencing the worst moments of their lives. Always the caretaker, she never minded lending her strength to others in their time of need. It was easier to do the more familiar they were; the more she cared.

The moment she realised her feelings ran far deeper than she would have expected in such a short time, was the most inopportune possible. Seeing someone she loved falling apart was confronting, but also prompted an outpouring of compassion and emotion at a level she had not expected.

She watched as the progress made on his insecurities slipped through their fingers, like sand in an hourglass, overturned before the opposing side had the chance to fill. She hated seeing him reduced to a boy warring with himself about his feelings for a father who lacked the capability to be a decent human being, let alone one who loved his son. She decided to give all she could, staying with him all night and enduring his tumultuous emotions alongside him. When he felt like talking she listened, let him work out his frustrations and fears with her, what else was there for her to do when someone she loved was hurting?

“He couldn’t just rot in prison like he was supposed to. He had to come back and ruin everything I’ve worked to build these past few months. I don’t want to live like this, I just wanted things to be quiet and peaceful and I thought maybe that wasn’t too much to ask of the universe, considering the shit I’ve been through… but I guess it wasn’t done making me pay for my mistakes just yet.”

“I know you’re scared and angry right now, you have every right to be; but you can’t blame the universe, or yourself for that matter. There are no words to describe the type of monster your father is and everything that is happening right now is his fault and his alone. But I promise we’ll pull through it.”

“He threatened you Hermione!!! How can you be so level-headed about this!? I mean, I’m not naïve enough to believe we both weren’t aware of the dangers our relationship might entail, but how can you not blame me for it? I can’t understand it, I’m his son, his blood is in my veins and yet you don’t hate me… every time I think that I might scare you off or that you’ll leave, you stand by me; and yet my first instinct, at the first sign of trouble, is to run so fast and so far… Well this time I’m not running, I’m going to do what I should have done last time and bloody well fight for the woman I lo-“

Her heart lurched in her chest at the implications of his unfinished sentence. Did she want him to admit it? She had only come to the realisation herself mere hours ago and she couldn’t deny it was much too soon for convention’s sake. But right now, it was a glimmer of light in an incredibly dark time, and good Godric she wanted to hear it … besides, they had never been conventional, why start worrying about it now…

“For the love of Merlin, finish that sentence Draco.”

“I know it’s only been… I- um, I didn’t want t-“

“Does It look like I’m worried? Finish your bloody sentence.”

“Fine. I love you! And I’m going to damn well prove I can be as stupidly reckless about protecting you, as you are when it comes to the people you love. Honestly, I’d sooner avada the bastard myself than let him anywhere near you.”

She couldn’t help but smile at him and it widened seeing his determination spark back to life, overpowering his anxiety; she hadn’t planned to tell him, but saying it back was all that mattered:
even if she did take a little creative license in order to lighten the mood (strange as it may have sounded).

“Well then, you had best be prepared for me to be just as reckless. And I don’t know how you managed it, but you’ve made a death threat sound rather romantic.”

She watched him as he came to understand her meaning. Replaying his own words, he quickly figured out her thinly veiled admission. The shock on his face was a little bittersweet, still the same old insecurities; like he couldn’t believe she would ever willingly offer him her heart.

But she had promised that one day she would prove it to him, today was as good a day as any.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

How to write a villain:
step 1: call everybody fools
step 2: can you imagine them saying muhahaha and doing the 'over folded hands' evil grin/stare?
step 3: are they cheesy?
if yes, congratulations it's a villain.

also omg, I couldn't help myself !!! if dad threatning to kill your gf isn't motivation to say I love you, then I don't know what is :) 

feel free to drop me a kudos or just say hi, maybe leave some feedback if you feel like it;
I make a point of replying because I love hearing from all of you ...
enjoy xo Em
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Ok, so for the first time in ages I checked the stats on this, and I'd like to thank everyone who has read this, has left comments and all 151 of you who have left kudos. It's really encouraging and I appreciate it so much.

*cries because you are all so lovely and I want to hug all of you and bake thousands of cookies to say thank you.*

no warnings but there will be some soon, promise.

Chapter Notes

Draco's POV again. I have to admit I love writing from his perspective, it was a big part of the reason I decided to switch between POV's, I wanted to study both reactions to the plot as it developed.

I'm still working on bringing these two closer but I'm also setting up the plot so please excuse my exposition, next few chapters are going to deal with the inter-house crew dealing with the news of Lucius' escape and a few other things I think you'll all enjoy (but no hints) :)

enjoy xo Em

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

In a split second, he had imagined their conversation going many ways, it slipped his mind to include the possibility she returned his feelings. It was a habit he was trying hard to break, but it remained intrusive and deeply ingrained. He had loved her from afar for years but that was nothing compared to the privilege of being close to her, or to the pure elation knowing she loved him back.

‘She would tell me she loves me in the most convoluted way possible.’

It was a feeling he had been unprepared for. All the books and movies that were remotely romantically inclined had been overly sappy, or just plain ridiculous in depicting the ways people reacted to being told they were loved. (though he didn’t always mind sappy, he rather liked old movies for that predictability).

‘The Empire Strikes Back’ had been one of the more annoying representations; after watching Han simply say ‘I know’ to Leia’s admission, he had almost ejected the tape. He couldn’t understand why someone (Even for the purpose of fiction) wouldn’t want to jump for joy and scream from the bloody mountain tops that someone, out of billions upon billions of people loved them.

Well, he certainly wasn’t going to let himself forget to be grateful about it. Whatever she gave, he would gladly accept and return tenfold; not just because it was more than he deserved, but because
he knew all too well how it felt to be unloved and lonely. He never wanted her to feel he took her for
granted, he knew so many others that did. Hell, if the Weasel hadn’t been so apt at making it so
obvious, he wouldn’t be where he was now, with the girl of his dreams telling him she loved him…
‘saying that will never get old’ he mused.

Letting those three words slip hadn’t been part of the plan, not so early in the piece… But, figuring
out she was saying them back had left him scrambling for breath all the same. Knowing that he had
earned it at all hit him like a supernova, and he found her offered reassurance set his mind so
perfectly at ease, he was truly able to enjoy the moment.

He had a feeling if he could see his own expression he would look rather like an owl; all wide-eyed
and blinking with shock.

‘That must be why she keeps smiling at me. I must look like a right dolt.’ he thought absentmindedly.

Getting a hold of himself, he smiled back and pulled her to him. Locking her in a crushing embrace.
Unable to resist he trailed a line of delicate kisses from her shoulder, up the column of her throat;
reaching her lips he kissed her, putting every shred of gratitude, devotion and adoration into it he
could muster. By the time he pulled away, both their cheeks were wet with each other’s tears. Her
cheeks shone, and she smiled up at him as he gently used his sleeve to dry them. Clearly not done
with him, she mirrored his earlier actions and he shivered when her lips found his pulse point before
she kissed him properly. She made it so easy to forget the world around him.

Holding her close burned away the darkness, like the brightest of Lumos charms. She put his world
back on its axis when he had felt like he was careening into space. He had to marvel at how utterly
right he felt; like he had viewed the world in a blur, only able to reach clarity with her in his life. He
couldn’t lose her; be it greed, selfishness or love driving him: he meant it when he said he would
rather kill his father if it meant keeping her safe. It was a grand and sickening admission, but his
father simply wasn’t worth it when compared to her.

The letter still terrified him: His reaction to it troubled him even more. He knew the instant he saw it
that his father had escaped. He felt so powerless, it crushed him to know that people would suffer
because of his family again, especially when he had worked so hard to start building bridges with
those who survived encountering Malfoys during the war.

He would deal with the matter of his injured pride later, allowing such a show of weakness in public
made him uncomfortable, but he was in a way glad to place his trust in his new friends. Besides, he
couldn’t have suppressed it if he had tried, seeing that letter had felt like the world suddenly
imploded.

It worried him to no end that his father knew how close he had become to Hermione and her friends,
he was not someone to be trifled with. Draco knew better than to underestimate his father. He could
play the loyal, weak minded follower; but he was as sadistic as Voldemort on his best days and took
great pleasure in being the right hand of the Dark Lord before his fall from grace.

As much as he hated Potter, he had to wonder if he felt the same when people were placed in the line
of fire because of him. It was the most intense guilt he had ever faced, second only to the guilt he
carried over Hermione’s torture in the Manor.

Though his mind was fractically trying to come to terms with events, he felt slightly more at ease
being held by her. Eventually, he realised how exhausted he was. His posture became unbearable
and he felt himself sag against her continued embrace. She felt it too and he had to thank Merlin for
her sense to put him to bed.
The way she fusses over him transported him to his early childhood: to a time before his interfering father decided he needed to be a man and less dependent; back when his mother would tuck him in and whisper endearments to him as he fell asleep. Not that he ever wanted to draw comparisons between his Girlfriend and his Mother, he merely forgot how it felt to be shown the affection love carried in its wake.

She had ordered him into the shower with the promise of tea once he was out. He had tried to protest, feeling much too tired to bother; but ended up thanking Salazar he took her advice. It melted away the tension he had been holding and he felt worlds better for it. She kept her promise and he found a mug of scalding hot tea waiting on the bench. He picked it up and headed to her room, knowing she would be there. He knocked and a second later she opened the door.

They sat across from each other on the bed, legs crossed and knees touching; both clutching their mugs. It went unspoken that they needed to discuss what they were going to do about his father.

“Your father certainly gave away more than he intended making such specific threats.”

“Usually he would be far more cautious, perhaps Azkaban left him somewhat addled.”

He tried to joke but it came across half-hearted. They were both scared and trying to cope with the interruption to their hard-earned peace.

“Perhaps...Well, either way, there’s certainly more to work with than it seems. First, I’d assume he’s smart enough to know not to make threats when in danger yourself so that gives us a solid foundation to make other assumptions. Second, he’s after you and your mother; He wants his family back and from the way he was talking, he has either found someone new to follow or has taken up the mantle himself; I’m not sure which scares me more... But it explains how he managed to escape and find a safe-haven so quickly. Third, he wants me dead; I would assume he also extends those sentiments toward Harry, Ron and likely Neville. The four of us had a direct hand in the demise of Voldemort, though he is understandably targeting me for my blood and my connection to you. Fourth and finally; he has people watching us, meaning there are students whose parents are in on this as well. While we may not know the extent, we can certainly keep our eyes open and try to find out more next term.”

“I see your point, plenty to work with; I still don’t see how this is going to help us when the term ends? My mother is in protective custody, I can’t go home, and I can’t stay here either, not to mention the fact he’s watching us, which is so fucking creepy; it makes me want to crawl out of my skin.”

“I’m with you on that, but I did say I had an idea... Your father, he hates the muggle world, right?”

he resisted the strong urge to roll his eyes at her question, but she got the message and continued her line of questioning anyway

“Would I be correct in assuming he wouldn’t want to venture into it?”

“He goes out of his way to avoid it.”

He had a feeling whatever her plan was, he was either going to love or hate it. It made him nervous seeing her smirk as she toyed with him, but he was completely enthralled by it all the same.

“It’s settled then.”
“I feel like I’ve missed something, what’s settled?”

“You’ll stay with me in London.”

oOo

He couldn’t fault her logic, staying in the muggle world was one hell of a solution. The Aurors could monitor comings and goings to and from the magical world and it would increase the possibility of his father (or anyone doing his bidding) being caught.

His father had always hated the muggle world and during the war, often griped about going on revels, simply due to the inconvenience. It would be highly unlikely he would bother trying to find Draco there; thus, his father would be forced to carry out any plans in the wizarding world, where it would be significantly easier to attempt to outmanoeuvre him.

He really had fallen for one brilliant witch. He had to wonder if she could apply her talent for strategy to his Quidditch team, they’d never lose a match (not that it mattered right now). He let her detail her plan while he sat dumbstruck at her ability to solve every scenario he threw her way.

She explained that her family home would be their intended safehouse. Now under a fidelius charm with Potter as the secret keeper; it was the perfect place for them to hide until they could go back to Hogwarts. Draco quickly realised it would be her first time going back since obliterating her parents, the slight tremor in her voice and hands giving her away. He decided then that he would do his utmost to make sure he mitigated some of the burden; plans already taking shape to make their time festive and distracting, in the hopes of protecting her from her own despair.

oOo

Sometime before dawn, in the few remaining hours of darkness, he woke from his first nightmare in weeks. His ears were ringing, and he could have sworn the pain of the curse hitting him in the chest lingered beyond the veil of sleep. Running his hands up his face and through his hair, he let out a ragged breath and prayed he would feel tired soon. He hated being awake at times like these; the silence was crushing, and he often couldn’t handle being in his own head.

However, he quickly reminded himself where he was; that he didn’t have to bear the solitary confinement of the darkness alone. A halo of frizz caught the slightest hint of light and illuminated the outline of her mass of curls; watching her draw steady breaths was comforting as well. He toyed with a soft lock of hair and wondered how he had ever teased her for it; frankly, it had fast become one of his favourite things to stare at when she inevitably distracted him through the day. The way it shone and moved with her was captivating, like everything else about her.

Watching her sleep peacefully was another pastime he had taken to. He knew it might be a little weird; but after his worst nightmares released him, it had been a comfort to watch her breathe consistently. It helped convince him she was real and alive, rather than cold and lifeless the way she was in his dreams.

He usually refrained from touching her (though once or twice they awakened rather tangled), it was a boundary he had refused to cross even once they had started dating. She had argued he was being silly, but he wasn’t about to explain that he was afraid of such a simple thing, he just wasn’t used to close physical contact, but he was quietly working through it. So, they compromised and called sharing a bed a ‘treatment’ to remain clinical and platonic about how they dealt with their nightmares. But, after the numerous and horrific ways he had seen her die at the hands of his father (definitely delayed reaction to the letter); he had to break his own rules, just to be sure this wasn’t the dream.
He gently wrapped an arm around her waist and she relaxed into his touch with a sigh. He regretted stirring her; but he wasn’t complaining when she consciously shifted closer and wrapped him around her, keeping a tight hold on his hand her fingers intertwined with his. He went back to focusing on her breathing and sleep found him once again. His last thoughts were on how wonderful her hair smelled (mint and grapefruit perhaps?) and how perfectly she fit against him, body and soul; jagged edges and all.

He could feel her warmth seeping into the cracks of his heart, cementing herself in place with a sense of finality that made his breath hitch. If he had his life over, he would do anything to end up here sooner than reality allowed. So much wasted time teasing and arguing and pretending to hate each other; had they just been honest, maybe he could have spared her the loneliness he knew she suffered despite having the other two-thirds of the golden trio… Maybe she could have saved him too; kept his heart from turning to stone so young, given him a chance at the happiness he had now.

He found that in the midst of the storm clouds gathering on the horizon, taking the form of his father; she was his lighthouse. Seeing her smile, hearing her laugh, the glint in her eyes when she was up to mischief, the way she used his smirk against him… All things that contributed to her being the brightest light in his otherwise dismal life. He held her just that little bit tighter and finally let himself fall asleep; the rhythm of her breathing matched his, and little did he know; So did her heartbeat.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

feel free to leave a comment, some feedback or kudos, they make my day and i love replying to them :)

Next update will be tomorrow or the day after, I've got so much in my head at the moment, I cant write it out or edit it fast enough :)

much love xo Em
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

So we are back with Hermione this time, I hope I've done an ok job mixing fluff with feels, this chapter really needed it to stick with the purpose of the fic (to be realistic yet ultimately a fluff piece)

Chapter Notes

considering I'm such a chatterbox in the notes, I don't have too much to say for this chapter but i am still super excited about it. I'm working hard to churn out chapters and I'm basically at the point of writing whatever flits into my brain. I always intended this to be a fairly long fic so I hope no one minds things being really fleshed out, I am trying my hardest to keep things building at a steady pace though :)

enjoy xo Em

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

It was the last day of term and Hermione was headed for the prefect’s carriage with a lot on her mind. In the week that followed Draco receiving Lucius’ letter, she had watched him pick up the shattered pieces of his security; It was humbling to witness his strength and it amazed her how he shouldered the burden and then some. She respected him immensely for it, even if he didn’t see it. Ginny, Neville and Luna had shown a lot of tact as well. She knew Draco had been anxious about being so vulnerable with others, but the way they supported him seemed to bring back some of the vitality he had lacked since the letter arrived. He had opened up to her about how it affected him, and she found herself regretting she hadn’t been there for him sooner. As he reiterated the difference between friends and followers and how little he trusted others, choosing to hide the best of himself away behind his sneer and cold insults; she found herself deeply regretting her lack of courage and wishing she reached out years ago.

It made her ridiculously happy to see him overcome that initial distrust and accept that for once, people knew something personal and had no intention of using it against him. Those who had been present had been nothing but kind and understanding (Luna even baked cookies, which was a lovely gesture, even if they did taste awful). Knowing his family and fellow Slytherins had created the need for self-preservation truly enraged her. If Lucius Malfoy came close enough, he’d find himself at the end of her wand and in a great deal of hot water.

Still, she could tell there was a lot bothering Draco. She would have expected nothing less; he carried the weight of the world around with him and though she tried to accept some of his burden, she knew it would never be enough. So, she gave him her acceptance; it was the best she could do, but he seemed to love her all the more for it. Knowing that she didn’t mind seeing his flaws clearly helped. The fact he accepted hers just as easily was a balm for her own soul as well.
Despite all the worry surrounding them, she had to admit that spending Christmas together might be exactly what she needed. While she loved going to The Burrow, she didn’t much feel like dealing with a snarky Molly or the rest of the Weasley clan. She loved them all dearly, but this would be her first Christmas without her parents and she truly didn’t know what to expect from herself, she wanted to grieve freely. On the other hand, Draco seemed to understand what she was going through almost immediately and she added it to the list of things she loved about him.

Merlin knew she wouldn’t get sick of her little game either. They had both made a point of saying it as much as possible once it was out in the open. They had even come clean to their friends about their not so new developments as a couple (though she had yet to properly inform Harry and Ron).

Ginny had naturally been over the moon. There had been a lot of firewhiskey and even more screaming. She smiled at the thought of Ginny asking what he was like in bed; telling her that he liked to cuddle hadn’t been the best idea, though it was the truth; after waking up ensconced in his arms, she hadn’t wanted him to let her go. Though Ginny’s immediate jump to conclusions had led to an hour-long explanation as to why they shared a bed most nights, she had to admit it felt good to be honest about it. She was proud to be with him and hell, she wanted everyone to bloody know it. Regrettably, she didn’t manage to escape Ginny’s tips on seduction (not that she needed to worry about that, there was enough spark between them to set the bloody castle on fire half the time).

Luna had been excited in her own way. The moment Hermione had finished explaining, the blonde witch had grabbed her hand and read her palm as though she were confirming what she already knew. Muttering to herself about something to do with the lines being a perfect match, she bid Hermione a quick goodbye and tacked on a hearty ‘congratulations’.

Neville had been a little more interesting, Draco had been the one to accidentally break the news; and to Hermione’s great amusement, had copped the ‘If you hurt her, I will kill you the same way I killed Nagini, only slower’ talk. She had laughed for a good five minutes when Draco had found her in the hallway looking positively shell-shocked. The only reason she found it so funny, was because she knew if Ron and Harry ever came to terms with her new(ish) beau, their threats would be far more imaginative. Ron’s would likely include slugs, he still hadn’t let that one go.

Draco had also been the one to inform Blaise and Theo, and apparently, he had earned a revision on his prior nickname: ‘future Mr. Granger.’ She found it hilarious; Draco had pouted and tossed his mates to the lioness by informing her they had bet on when the two would start dating. Though she was none too pleased about it, she couldn’t help but find it rather sweet that his friends had accepted her before she had even befriended Draco.

oOo

Refocusing on the issues she had been attempting to mull over before distracting herself, she finally found an empty compartment and set about writing a reply to Harry and Ron. The first thing she had done was send an owl to warn them. They hadn’t been aware of the threat Lucius posed and were positively livid to hear that he had threatened her directly. She had included that they would be staying in her old home but knew better than to add that they were any more than friends. That was a conversation that needed to happen in person.

Their reply had been a little forceful in requesting she seek the ministry’s assistance, but she didn’t trust them one bit. Knowing Lucius had people spying on his behalf made her wary of authority. Not to mention Harry and Ron both sounded far too trusting, she had to wonder if they were somewhat blinded by their training with the Aurors.

Lost in thought eventually Draco had come to find her and make sure she ate something. He knew she needed a little time to herself to prepare for the possibility of an attack at the station. She knew
that was when they would all be most vulnerable, direct threat or no. The best they could do was apparate directly from the platform; but after the war, Hermione had enough sense to know that even the best-laid plans often went awry.

She returned to the compartment Ginny, Neville, Blaise, Theo, Luna and Draco occupied. It was a little cramped, but she noticed Theo was taking the opportunity to chat up Luna who looked more than receptive. It was rather cute watching the two flirt and she nudged Draco to have a look. He smirked down at her and whispered;

“I knew those two would get on.”

He left his head on her shoulder and they stayed that way, ignoring their nerves until the train pulled into the station.

She sighted Molly and Arthur on the platform, Ginny had already explained how imperative it was they all left immediately, so she gave them both a quick wave before grabbing her things and getting off the train. As soon as Draco returned she looped her arm through his and they side along apparated to her place.

oOo

Getting through her wards was a breeze, she had been worried; considering she had set them in the midst of the war, they were very strong and very picky, but Draco had been fine.

Her parent’s house… No, her house looked the same as it always had. It was taking everything she had not to cry as she walked up the front steps. She could see her younger self, toddling up the steps with her parents chasing after her, ghosts of her past she could never shake off; death made no difference to loss in this case.

He walked up after her and steadied her shaking hand in his after a few failed attempts at unlocking the door. She stepped through and found the entry covered in dust and cobwebs, delving further into the house that was no longer a home, she pulled the sheets off the furniture. It was revealing the chairs that hit her hardest, in the living room, in the dining room… there were too many for her alone.

She could feel herself losing touch and she sat down, thinking she might pass out, she lowered her head to suppress the dizziness. Draco had watched her staring into space as she contemplated but he didn’t touch her or speak. She was glad, there was nothing anyone could do to fix the overwhelming feelings she was attempting to sort through.

Eventually, she managed to wade through enough of her grief to cast a spell to clean the house and light the lights. That was when he extended a hand to help her up from where she had taken root.

“Where’s the kitchen?”

She looked at him dumbly for a moment before leading the way.

He looked through the cupboards and after finding a jar or two of pasta sauce and then, the pasta itself; it looked like the beginnings of a simple but decent enough meal (until they could get to a supermarket).

She crept out to her parents now unkempt and overgrown greenhouse, he was distracted looking for utensils and she didn’t really want to acknowledge she knew where everything was; even that was painful. Taking cuttings of whatever was suitable, she slipped back inside and grabbed a chopping board, before he had the chance to protest.
They worked in silence but in sync, dinner had turned out a success. She hadn’t realised he could cook, let alone make the meagre ingredients on offer into something rather good. Slowly she started to feel comfortable again, as though her mind was convincing itself her parents were coming right back. It was easy to let that dream take hold and forget that Monica and Wendell Wilkins had no idea who Hermione Granger was.

She was thankful Draco knew not to push her, she could see him worrying about her behind his collected façade. She wanted to take her mind off things and put his at ease at the same time. She headed into the living room where he had curled up with a book and opened the cupboard under the T.V., she pulled out her well-loved copy of Beauty and the Beast and set up the tape.

He shot her a questioning look and she rolled her eyes, wandlessly bookmarking his page before placing it on the coffee table. She could see him enjoying the film and it was with his face in her mind’s eye she fell asleep.

Her dreams were a jumble of horrors that night. Her death repeated over and over, but her killer never changed. Lucius Malfoy hunted her, tortured her, shot her, avadad her; muggle methods blended with Magical and every time, Draco was there to witness it. The look on his face broke her heart. Then when all the dying ended, she was forced to watch the aftermath, an unseen mourner at her own funeral.

Watching Harry cry as he threw dirt over her coffin, Ron and Ginny following behind, their faces red and tear streaked. Her parents followed suit with no emotion on their faces and then finally Draco. She watched as Harry placed a hand on his shoulder to encourage him, but Draco shrugged him off and refused because he ‘couldn’t throw mud at her no matter how symbolic it was’. Instead, she watched him drop a single rose with a gold ring tied to it, into her place of eternal rest. Her consciousness followed the rose but instead of crashing into her own coffin, she began to fall into a dark, endless abyss.

When she reached the bottom, she was met with a cold, damp cell and she screamed for what felt like years. She must have screamed for real because she woke in her own bed to find Draco holding her tightly enough she couldn’t move. She knew that meant she had been thrashing about and she hoped she hadn’t hurt him. Now that she was awake, he released his grip, instead gently running his spare hand through her hair, she held on to the sensation to ground herself.

“Do you want to talk about why you were screaming my name, and not in a fun way?”

She laughed a little and honestly appreciated that he was trying to make her feel better, but her dreams had left her feeling rattled and she was far from okay. She also knew she wasn’t going to be sleeping any time soon; no harm would come from telling him about what she had seen; after all, she supposed if she couldn’t talk to him about it, who else was there. So, she told him everything.

He took in her words and she hid her tears in the darkness of her old room. It had been so incredibly real, and he had offered his understanding. She knew he suffered the same way she did, and once she had finished telling him about what she had seen, he reciprocated and told her about his own nightmares. If she hadn’t already been sure he loved her, that would have been all the proof she needed. Not only did he finally trust her enough to tell her, he admitted that losing her remained his worst fear. She was finally able to understand why he was so insecure, so fraught with anxiety, why his reaction to Lucius’ threats had been so adverse.

Trying to lighten the mood, she jokingly returned his comment about what an odd pair they were; recalling how intense their first night together in their dorm had been. She saw him smile and gladly returned to his quickly offered embrace.
She must have dozed off at some point, in order to wake confused. Draco was missing, so she went through her morning meditation and grounding techniques alone (something they had recently started doing together, after he convinced her to see a mind healer a few weeks ago), strangely the familiar sight of her room had the opposite effect than the day before; calming her, rather than setting her on edge.

When she was finished she got up and set about finding her wayward boyfriend. Walking downstairs in a sleep-deprived haze, she didn’t notice the bannister was covered in tinsel; it was the first indication of the surprise awaiting her. She wandered into the living room and her senses were positively assailed:

She was surrounded by her family’s decorations, ornaments, tinsel and all manner of Christmassy things they had collected over the years; the only new additions were the Origami reindeer, enchanted to pull a festively looking origami sleigh through the air; it looped around her and the movement of air in front of her pushed the warm, cloying scent of pine needles and gingerbread her way. The radio was on and tuned to a Christmas themed station and she teared up a little as the shock subsided.

She picked up her pace trying to find Draco and almost his familiar shock of platinum hair peeking out from under a blanket. She took in the sight of him curled up in an attempt to fit his form on the too short lounge; his feet didn’t manage to fit, not if he wanted somewhere to rest his head.

She kneeled quietly beside him and pressed a light kiss to his cheek before gently shaking him.

He was only half aware she was there and with a huff, he rolled over and asked for five more minutes; a few seconds later he shot up and bounded into the kitchen to check the oven, her laughter following him down the hall.

She was rather glad to find he was nothing like Harry when it came to cooking; if it weren’t for the cookies he was now setting out to cool, she would have no idea the kitchen had been touched. Everything was in order and all the surfaces were clean (Harry had a bad habit of eating first and then forgetting the dishes, which annoyed her to no end).

He smiled at her from across the bench top and she could see the childish mischief brewing as it turned into a smirk.

“I know it’s a bit naughty, but I figured we could eat these for breakfast.”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea, I’d hardly be able to resist. But how did you manage to do all of this? When did you even go shopping?”

“Oh, I-uh, ducked out when you fell asleep; grabbed a few essentials from the twenty-four-hour Tesco down the road and just figured there’s nothing better at Christmas than gingerbread so… as for the rest, I’d been planning it since you told me we were coming here, a well modified silencing charm and it was a breeze to put up. I knew you hadn’t been back and I wanted to thank you for setting aside your feelings to help me; you said it didn’t feel like home anymore, but that didn’t mean we couldn’t have a proper Christmas here. I know it might not be the same, and maybe it’s not my place, but I figured you deserved some damn joy, despite everything going on.”

She watched him retreat into his shell after explaining his actions, clearly nervous that she didn’t like what he had done. She had been too busy being shocked to know what her expressions were conveying, and she hoped she hadn’t been the cause of his uncertainty. He had gone out of his way
to make her happy and Merlin-be-damned if she was going to let him ‘clam up’ now.

Still a little amazed he had done everything by hand and found time to bake, she completely forgot how harrowing coming home had been, it made her feel like she’d had weeks, not twenty-four hours to come to terms with being back.

She walked around the kitchen island that stood between them and hooked a finger in the material of his shirt to draw him closer… Circe she loved him. He didn’t resist, and she looped her arms around his neck and pulled him into one hell of a kiss.

She didn’t quite know how long it had already gone on for, nor did she care; the only thing her conscious mind cared about, was the way he was currently biting her bottom lip and where her own hands were wandering under his t-shirt.

It seemed they had more bravado this morning than either of them had realised (and she hadn’t even had a caffeine hit yet). Things were certainly heading into unknown territories for the both of them, but she wasn’t too worried about it. At some point, he had set her up on the countertop and she’d had a brief moment of sensible thought; she used it to mentally laugh at the fact she was wrapped around him like a koala. She had no intentions of letting him go and frankly she wanted to see how far they’d take this, the way he was now biting and sucking at her neck made her entire body throb and Godric knew she wanted him.

Regrettably, luck was not on her side and a loud knock resounded through the relatively quiet house. He growled, and she could see he was about to pull away; she could practically hear the ‘fuck off!’ that was on the tip of his tongue. Thinking quickly, she wrapped her legs around his waist to stop him moving and whispered:

“Maybe if we keep reeeeaaallly quiet, they’ll go away?”

He quirked an eyebrow at her and replied:

“As much as I would love that, it’s probably Pothead or Weasel checking in, seeing as Ginny is at the Burrow. Though it might be best if you answer, I don’t really fancy facing either of those two considering the state I'm in. ”

It took her a second to catch his meaning and she extricated herself, jumped down from the bench and gave him a quick peck on the cheek (she almost laughed at how tame the gesture was in comparison to moments before). She would deal with the nicknames after she answered the door.

‘Today is certainly going to be interesting’ She thought as she ushered Harry inside.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

I bet you’re all super annoyed with me for interrupting these two. *hides because I'm ashamed of myself too*... I feel like it comes with the territory of a slow burn, but I had to deal with Harry before I moved these two forward.
Feel free to let me know how you're finding this, I live for feedback. Or if you prefer, leave a kudos :)

till next time
xo Em
If the knock on the door hadn’t been enough of a mood killer, the person behind the door certainly did the trick. Draco stayed in the kitchen and leaned against the bench willing himself to ‘calm down’. He heard the door close and then Hermione heading back down the hall, a second set of footsteps following her. She found him a few moments later and grabbed a couple of glasses of water before heading back out. He had almost thought he had escaped having to deal with the Boy Wonder, but she quickly swung back and suggested if he wanted to avoid a hexing he would be in the living room promptly.

‘Well there’s no point getting myself on the business end of her wand’ he thought as he padded into the living room.

He nodded a curt greeting to Potter and sat down next to Hermione. His Slytherin side wanted nothing more than to see how much he could infuriate Potter by hinting at what was going on between himself and Hermione, but he didn’t need three crazy wizards after him. So, he sat quietly and let them go about catching up.

After sorting through the main issue at hand, spending hours making escape plans, detailing alternative safehouses and finally agreeing that they would check in with an Auror between noon and one every day (something to do with making sure the Aurors would know if they were kidnapped); Harry seemed to forget he was there and had begun nattering on about Ginny and some or other distance issue they were having.

Hermione was listening intently and seemed to absentmindedly lean into him. Potter was too busy ranting about his feelings to notice. Draco had been almost completely lost in his head when he was snapped back to reality by Hermione’s excited shrieking. Startled back into the present, he searched for the reason and noticed Potter had set an engagement ring down on the coffee table.
He spoke for the first time since Potter arrived.

“Well, Weaselette is sure in for a surprise!”

He chuckled and bumped Hermione’s shoulder with a wolfish grin. She looked up at him, her expression a half-hearted attempt at annoyance.

“He’s right Harry, she's worried you're going to break up with her because you’ve been apart so long; she’s not going to expect this at all. Have you talked to Arthur about it?”

“Yeah I asked him the other week, I’ve never been more scared in my life and I’ve fac-”

Harry cut himself off as he realised just how insensitive his comment might sound. Draco could see the apologetic look on Pothead’s face and knew it wasn’t worth his time to make the golden boy sweat over his manners. He didn’t want to be treated like he was fucking fragile.

“Please Potter, I doubt Weasley senior was half as scary as that noseless prick.”

He loved watching Potter’s jaw drop at his comment.

“Fair point… I’ve often wondered why he didn’t have one after resurrecting. It was so tempting to ask who took it.”

Draco’s involuntary snort at Potter’s quip sent his former rival into fits of laughter. Draco was a little confused as to what was so funny; but Potter eventually explained that he hadn’t expected to be sitting in Hermione’s house, cracking jokes about the dark lord with Draco Malfoy, of all people.

He supposed he hadn’t expected to be the one laughing at Potter’s stupid jokes. He pouted a little and Hermione suppressed a smile at his childish expression.

“Doesn’t mean I like you, Potter.”

“Sure, just like you ‘hate’ Ron. Didn’t stop you helping him out though…Face it Malfoy, you’re a softie.

“Am not.”

“Are too!”

He could see Hermione trying to keep her building mirth under wraps, but she was failing fast. Deciding a change of subject was in order, he decided to ask how Potter planned on asking Ginny. Potter looked stunned that he was taking an interest and quickly started going through his plan.

At least the idiot was keeping it simple, a Christmas day proposal with no bells and whistles; Less to mess up that way. If he knew anything about Ginny from their rather excellent chats, she would definitely prefer low-key. Hermione was positively enraptured listening to Harry go on about how excited he was to find out what Ginny’s answer would be. She didn’t seem to realise that she’d absentmindedly taken his hand in hers. Potter certainly noticed quickly though and came to a screaming halt mid-word.

“Uh ’Mione, what are you doing?”

She still didn’t pick up on what she’d done and looked at Potter curiously before attempting to wave dismissively with the hand currently holding Draco’s. Lifting his hand with her own as she attempted the gesture, he saw her blush deeply before letting him go.
“I’m... uh. Oh Merlin, help me out here Draco.”

“Nope, this one’s on you. You wanted to be the one to tell him.”

She shot him a scathing look and turned back to Harry who was looking very peaky.

“Do you want the long or the short version?”

“I think you better go with the long version ’Mione.”

It took her an hour to get through the long version and Potter only interjected a handful of times. It seemed he was handling the news relatively well and Hermione left very little out, so he wasn’t lacking in reasons for how they had managed to end up together. Once she had finished he waited for the inevitable hex from the Auror-in-training, but it never came.

Making threats and glaring daggers wasn’t beyond him though and Draco could feel the restraint it was taking for the Golden Boy not to send another Sectumsempra his direction. Hermione, on the other hand, was having none of it, when the idiot decided to voice said threats in front of her she quickly put him in his place.

“You hurt her in any way and Hell will seem kind compared to what I will do to you, don’t forget that.”

“Harry! That’s enough. If you can’t play nice, you can leave. I said the same thing to Ron and I bloody well mean it, there will be none of that... and no, before you start; I don’t care that the situation is different, we were friends, now we’re dating it makes no difference. You would never have said that to Ron.”

Potter seemed to deflate as he figured out just how serious Hermione was. It stirred that strange possessive feeling in Draco watching her put Pothead in his place.

“So, you actually love him then?”

He knew to keep his mouth shut for this part, sticking his sarcasm in when Potter was trying to adjust to Draco being less of a prat (and suddenly dating his best friend), wasn’t going to help anyone. It did make him a little uncomfortable that they were discussing him like he wasn’t there though.

“Yes. He’s an insufferable prat, but he’s my insufferable prat.”

She nudged Draco’s shoulder playfully and Potter went a little green watching her be even slightly affectionate. He noticed a smirk playing on her lips and she got up and headed in the direction of the kitchen, leaving him to his devices with Potter before he could protest.

Harry was still attempting to process things, though he was taking it rather better than expected, perhaps he was more forgiving when it came to his surrogate sister than she realised. Draco was feeling more than a little bored, so he decided he may as well try to be amicable with Harry (didn’t mean he couldn’t have a little fun though).

“Oh, come on Potter! It’s not that hard to believe we actually like each other.”

He teased, adding a playful lilt to his voice. Potter kept his deer in the headlights expression.

“That’s not the issue, I can completely understand why you two like each other. It actually makes perfect sense, considering you’re both complete nerds. Not to mention, I can see how happy you make her, Merlin knows why she does... But she’s got her light back and I’ll always support
whatever or whoever keeps that light alive; the issue is, you and I are actually going to have to get along. That doesn’t bear thinking about.”

“I’ll take that acknowledgement as a compliment, but seriously Potter who knew you had such a flair for dramatics; I’m perfectly good mates with your soon to be Fiancée and the rest of her rag-tag crew, what’s to say we can’t pretend to not hate each other, for the sake of our girlfriends?”

“Fuck, that’s going to take some getting used to, but I guess you have a point”

“If you and I can agree on one thing, it’s that our respective witches are damn terrifying. I’d rather not be on either of their bad sides.”

“When did you get so bloody wise?”

“Hm, I’d say it was around about the same time I decided I wasn’t going to end up like my father.”

“Well for what it’s worth, I can see that you’re trying to make the most of the second chance you have. You’ll only ever hear me say this once; but I often wondered what ‘Mione saw in you, especially when she started that campaign, before your trial. She’d always say that if I gave you a chance, I’d see for myself. Now I’m seeing it. She wouldn’t be anywhere near you if you hadn’t proved yourself worthy, I can respect you for that. We may not like each other, but I don’t think I have it in me to hate you anymore.”

“Me either. I’m done with all that animosity and bullshit. It was juvenile and I'm tired of being hostile. I guess I should apologise for being a git though. You’ll only hear me say this once Potter, but I actually wanted to be friends at the start; I thought you of all people would get what it was like to be saddled with expectations and limelight, but I went about it the wrong way and we both ended up offended. So, I did what I do best, I lashed out. As for Weasley, our families have always hated each other, our rivalry was set from birth… And Hermione; well it’s no excuse for how I behaved, and I'm making up for that; but honestly, it was fifty-fifty brainwashing and a crush I had no idea how to handle at the time.”

He could see Harry considering his attempt at an apology and watched his old rival come to a conclusion. Judging by the smirk he was now on the receiving end of, it was a positive one.

“It’s funny how war changes people. You manage to mellow the fuck out and Ron turns into a god damn murtlap on a rampage at the drop of a hat.”

Draco couldn’t restrain his mirth at the mental image of Weaselbee as a murtlap, Potter quickly followed suit. They were far from friends, but Draco had quickly learned that people he had judged prematurely often far exceeded his expectations. He groaned at the thought of becoming friends with Potter, he had a feeling that it was bound to happen eventually.

Hermione seemed to have been satisfied with their progress from her eavesdropping and reclaimed her place beside Draco. This time she grabbed his hand the moment she sat down. Potter managed not to flinch and when all was said and done, Draco had to admit things had gone far better than expected (though he had set the bar fairly low, he had hoped for the excitement of a challenge).

Harry stayed a while longer and eventually left to have dinner with his soon to be in-laws. Before he stepped out into the night air, he cast a covert muffliato and pulled Draco aside for a quick, final word.

“If you’re as serious about her as I think you are, when the time comes, you had best make sure to ask my blessing before asking her. Her dad may not be able to give it to you, but I’m the closest thing
she has to a sibling and she deserves the effort. As much as I detest the idea, I'll set the past aside if it means she’s happy. I’m glad to see you're willing to do the same. You’re going to have one hell of a time telling Ron though, be sure to send me an invite I'd hate to miss it.”

“My how Slytherin of you Potter.”

“Well, the hat did want to put me in Slytherin, guess all that mischief-making would have gone down well in the snake pit.”

Harry stepped out and waved back at Hermione before apparating away.

“What did he say to you just now?”

“Oh, just the usual, I hate you and we are never going to be friends spiel.”

Hermione rolled her eyes at him and went back inside. He locked the door and followed her back to the living room.

“You know, I think you two might find yourselves fast-friends if you weren’t so stubborn”

“Sure, and we’ll play Quidditch on the weekends and go out for a pint after.”

“Fine, maybe frenemies then. I do plan on having a good talking to him though, I don’t need him turning green every time we happen to see him… I mean, I'm assuming we’ll-”

“Granger, it's fine to assume we have a future. Why else would we be bothering to do all of this if we both couldn’t visualize it?”

“I think that might be the nicest thing you’ve ever said to me.”

“Well, then I’ll have to do my best to keep topping that, your standards are far too low.”

A while later they were still tucked in on the couch, watching ‘Meet Me in St. Louis’. Fortunately, he knew this film was another one of her family’s favourites and he was prepared for the possible fallout. But it never really came; the only tears shed were during Judy Garland’s rendition of ‘Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas’. When her sister ran outside to destroy the snowmen, he heard Hermione whisper:

“I know how she feels.”

He wasn’t sure if she was telling him or telling herself, but he felt that sharp sting of wretchedness whenever he witnessed her openly grieve her parents. He held her that little bit tighter, just to let her know he was there for her.

They were still watching the film when Hermione spoke again. Knowing the characters were about to get engaged, he figured it made sense she would begin debriefing herself regarding Potter’s news

“I can’t believe he’s going to propose to Ginny, she’s going to be over the moon.”

“You know, it’s not too late to change your mind and go to the Burrow for Christmas, I'm sure they wouldn’t mind; you could be there to see it.”

“No, I want to be here. I don’t think I could handle so many people trying to make up for what I'm missing and falling short. It wouldn’t be fair to them. At least with you, I don’t have to worry, you
just get what I'm going through and find a way to help me move past it... I don't even think you know you're doing it half the time and that's what I like about it.”

“Well I appreciate the compliment, but considering I don't know I'm doing it, I would take that to mean you do most of it for yourself; you're just not giving yourself due credit.”

“You just did it then.”

“I did? what on earth could I have helped with just then?”

“I was feeling like I'm constantly relying on other people, including you…and you just said exactly what I needed to hear.”

He had to wonder just how often he unwittingly said something she used to help herself. She made out like it was a common occurrence, but he was just being honest.

They turned their attention back to the end of the film and when it was over, he rewound and switched it off; not wanting a repeat of those annoying colour bars. Thinking about interruptions he was instantly thrown back to their rather heated, almost escapades. He had been trying and failing for most of the day to keep his mind off it, but having a moment to himself, his mind wandered.

It had been wholly unexpected, and he wasn’t usually so brash; but she had been receptive enough and he had to wonder just how far she had been willing to go. He figured it might be time to own up to his woeful inexperience before he made a complete idiot of himself.

At this point he was certain she wasn’t going to care, they hadn’t built their friendship or relationship on unsteady foundations. It would have been so easy to get it over with sooner and work out all that latent sexual tension, but that would have gotten them nowhere. It wasn’t as though either of them felt that it was something to be worried about doing, they just needed to time it right. He had to wonder if this morning had been well timed (minus the interruption); things had kind of boiled over and perhaps they had just gotten carried away.

It was still on his mind when they started getting ready for bed. But it seemed she was thinking the same thing when she asked him about it. It seemed the darkness gave both of them the courage to voice their innermost thoughts, at least they could talk about things like this with each other, he guessed it was a blessing in disguise.

“So, this morning was an interesting development.”

“I don’t know if interesting is the word I’d use.”

“You seem nervous talking about it, is everything alright?”

“Yeah, I'm fine, I guess I should probably set the record straight though.”

“I mean I know I'm a bit of an anomaly but I'm fine with whatever your number is…”

It often amazed him how quickly she managed to catch his meaning and he smiled a little at her intuition (and at the fact she had clearly made the same assumptions everyone else did, he got a kick out of surprising her).

“Well, now I don’t have to worry, as long as you're fine with my number being zero.”

She choked, and he laughed at the adorable huff of indignation that followed.
“What do you mean zero? I had to listen to years of Lavender’s gossip about your exploits… Besides look at you! How is that even possible?”

“Said exploits were highly exaggerated and then there was the whole thing with Pansy, which I told you about and disappearing into the room of requirement sixth year; people just assumed and once it got going there was no point fighting it, I would have made it worse… I got the reputation and none of the fun so to speak. Not that I mind though, none of them could ever have mattered half as much as you.”

“Wow, you’re serious. I mean I was a little glad one of us would know what they were doing… I meant what I said though, it doesn’t matter at all, in fact, I’m happy to have you all to myself, despite how weirdly possessive that sounds. At least I won’t be the only one feeling nervous. When everything is theoretical, it’s easy to feel a little fearless, but I had been worried I would disappoint you.”

“Ok I’m going to attempt to unpack everything you just said; but try not to laugh while I do it okay. first off, you being possessive will always be a turn on. Hell! I figured out I liked you after you punched me in the face; it might make me a little bit of a masochist, but you left your mark on me that day, physically and mentally; after that I couldn’t get you out of my head so, possess away, just know that you’re mine too. Second, I’m nervous as hell for the same reasons you are, I kept putting off this damn conversation because I didn’t want to let on just how worried I was about not living up to expectations, you could never have disappointed me… I told you once that the right man would be happy to wait for you, that you were- are worth the wait; I meant it, it’s my job to make sure you aren’t disappointed. Third, it does seem easy in theory, and I expect you to tell me all about your ‘theory’; but I think, as long as we communicate, we’ll manage just fine… Ok, now you can laugh.”

She didn’t laugh at him, but apparently, that didn’t mean he hadn’t made her incredibly happy.

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Chapter End Notes

I don't think I need to explain where the next chapter is heading, do I? fair warning though, it will be my first attempt at writing anything remotely explicit, but I will do my best so please take it easy on me :)

feel free to leave a comment or some feedback, I always reply and I actually like answering your questions, so hit me with ’em :) or if that's not your style, leave me a kudos, they make my day :)

till next time
xo Em
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

Ok this update is technically two chapters in one that's why it took me a bit to get it done - starts with Hermione's POV and switches to Draco's after the asterisks.

warnings: SMUT HAS ARRIVED.

Chapter Notes

Alrighty, this is my first ever attempt at writing smut, I usually avoid it by quite literally using the mama mia "dot dot dot" method but I decided to challenge myself and give it a try, I hope I don't piss too many of you off if its crap.

please feel free to let me know if I did ok or not if you're comfortable doing so - it may have some bearing on how often I write chapters like this as the story goes on.

I'll be uploading another chapter over the weekend and getting right back to the plot. future smut will always have its own chapter that will continue from the previous chapter but not be relevant to the plot for anyone who may want to skip said chapters.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A lot of their friendship, now relationship was based on instinct. Hermione hadn’t really considered how well they managed it until she found herself unable to resist the incredibly sweet, if slightly vulnerable man currently beside her.

It wasn’t really a conscious decision to straddle him, but there she was before she had even realised what she was doing. Pressing feather light kisses to his jaw and down his throat, she had to wonder if she would have ever felt so confident or appreciated by anyone else. She could tell her teasing was having an effect and she rolled her hips ever so slightly to test her hypothesis. The pressure it provided was enough to win her a groan of appreciation from him and her body responded, it seemed to know where things were heading before her brain caught up.

What they were doing had a distinctly different feeling, it wasn’t going to be ‘just sex’, it felt like a promise… of more to come, of trust, of love and whatever else came with belonging. They’d done plenty of snogging but had managed to keep things fairly tame, considering the torrent of lust lingering behind the floodgates of their self-control. She took a second to reflect on the fact that they were able to redirect their passion toward more pleasurable activities.

She rather liked where she was situated, looking down at him; her hair falling in chestnut curtains around his face. He suppressed a laugh when a curl brushed against his cheek and pulled her down
on top of him, moving her hair aside in one swift movement. She could tell he was still nervous, but hers hadn’t quite set in.

She wanted to enjoy every last moment, so she was more than happy to go slow and let him catch up. It wasn’t as though she was worried he didn’t want her, being pressed against him as she was, she could feel him growing hard beneath her.

He brought his hands to rest on her lower back, just above the curve of her arse. She smiled into their kiss when he hooked his fingers into the waistband of her pyjamas. He pulled away, those expressive grey eyes of his found hers immediately.

“May I?”

“Please, Draco.”

She wanted to scream from the top of Ben Nevis that he could bloody well do what he liked, as long as he kept his hands on her, she made her point by grinding herself down on him. She had almost let out a whine when he did the opposite; although, once he set about undoing the buttons on her rather hilarious duck pyjamas, she was sufficiently appeased. How he found her attractive wearing those she would never know.

He seemed relax as he slowly bared her flesh to the warm air of her room. With each button opened, he would brush her newly exposed skin ever so gently with his fingertips, his touch was barely there and yet it felt as though he had reached in and touched her soul. The way he watched her shirt fall from her shoulders, taking a moment to admire her form, was incredibly sweet.

She returned the favour, drawing his shirt up and letting her fingers ghost over his sides, knowing he would jolt at the sensation. She leaned down again and nipped at his ear before letting her hands wander down the planes of his chest, she followed their path with open-mouthed kisses. She paused at the spot just below his navel but before she could continue her particular train of thought, he dragged her back up and quickly reversed their position, pressing her into the mattress.

She could feel his erection against her thigh and the way he had taken control had her squirming under him for any kind of friction or pressure. He could see what she was attempting to do and sweet Merlin, the smirk that followed just did things to her, things that she would never be able to logically explain.

“If you think for a second that I'm selfish enough to let you get me off first, you are dead wrong, Darling.”

She didn’t really have the chance to throw back a witty retort about his alliteration, as soon as he had finished his sentence he had kissed her with a new kind of hunger she had never seen from him. his hands moved to cup her breasts and she moaned into his mouth when he brushed his thumbs over her nipples; once, twice, three times...

She could feel herself flush, as his trajectory mirrored her abandoned journey south. He had most certainly found his feet now; taking his time to press lingering kisses to the underside of her breast, then taking the stiffened peak in his mouth before repeating on the other side.

She could feel the throbbing between her legs growing more insistent and she knew he was keeping his pace torturously slow for that exact reason. He reached her navel and she was just short of begging him to remove the last of her clothing. Pulling her pants and underwear down in one movement, she pressed her thighs together, her natural self-consciousness presenting itself once again.
“You are so fucking perfect.”

He pressed his lips to the inner part of her ankle and eased her legs apart as he worked his way up. His teasing was going to be the death of her, of course he would be a natural at making her fall to pieces before he even really touched her; with every caress she could feel the warmth of his magic seeping into her skin, as hers reached out to him in turn. After he passed her knee he did the same to her other leg and this time he pushed on; she felt him bite her inner thigh and she knew that after he soothed it, there would be a lovely mark there tomorrow.

Close to her apex, he stopped for a moment and she knew that he was waiting for her assent before continuing. She nodded, and he wasted no time putting his tongue to work, right where she needed it most. She sank her hands into his hair and held on for dear life.

Her nerve endings were on fire and she could see him watching her reactions to gauge what she liked best. She loved that every time he elicited a moan or an involuntary buck of her hips, that he would smile against her; taking pride in his work. She should have known his mouth would be positively sinful and sweet Merlin when he slipped one finger, then another into her, she had lost all coherent thought, reduced to a babbling, mewling mess under his ministrations.

She could feel the pressure of her orgasm building in her core; his fingers finding that perfect place inside her, helping to push her toward her eventual bliss, his tongue swirled over her clit in the most delectable manner and she was completely lost in the feeling.

“D-Draco, I'm s-so close. O-oh sweet Merlin keep doing that, please, God…L-love you, s-so much…”

She could hardly speak, her muscles were straining, and her body was shuddering in anticipation of her oncoming climax. Her sharp breaths made her feel lightheaded and when it finally hit, her vision went black and she heard herself murmuring his name over and over as she came, her muscles pulsing around his fingers.

He worked her through her orgasm, easing up when she jerked away, she giggled at his apology and reassured him that he was doing more than fine. He still changed what he was doing; resting his head on her thigh, he ran his thumb up and down her slit at a languid pace, sending tingles shooting up her spine every time he brushed over her most sensitive spot.

She had to figure that when his mouth wasn’t otherwise occupied, he would be a talker. (perhaps that silver tongue of his was the secret to his raw talent for oral?).

“You know, the way your legs shake just as you’re about to come is the hottest thing I think I’ll ever have the good fortune to witness. And Merlin the way you taste; I’m pretty sure amortentia would try to emulate that if I ever bothered to go near a vial of the stuff.”

She caught her breath as he spoke and pulled him back up to her level for another heated kiss. She could taste herself on his lips and she wanted nothing more than to make him feel every bit as amazing as she did.

Breaking their kiss, she gave him all the praise she could, knowing that he would want to know how he did; the shy smile he responded with made her heart melt. She felt her nerves start to seep into her veins like ice, but tried to ignore it as she reversed their position.

“My turn, Darling…”

Crawling her way down his body, she could see how much giving her pleasure affected him.
Reaching the waistband of his pyjamas she divested him of the rest of his clothing in a flash. Taking in the sight of him fully bared to her was truly something else. There were no soft edges to him despite how perfect he was to cuddle; he was lean and muscular, and she didn’t know how hipbones could be sexy, but damn if his weren’t. She didn’t even see the jagged sectumsempra scar running across his pale skin, it didn’t matter to her.

She was rather tempted to tease him the same way he had teased her. But she almost laughed at the thought of his reaction to her kissing her way up his leg before ravishing him. She decided that there were other ways to pay him back.

A second later, she gently ran her fingers down his hips and in toward his groin, before moving away and continuing down his thighs. Trying to set aside the small bout of panic that rose at the prospect of fitting him inside her; when his cock twitched with the anticipation of her movements, it caught her off guard; her brain kicked in and all of a sudden, her bravado was lost. She found herself out of her depth, her inexperience shining through. She could tease him all she liked but she had no idea what he would or wouldn’t like; and after what he had done for her, she didn’t want to be inadequate. She was left reeling at how quickly her small nerves had frozen her in place.

Her expression must have given her away and he sat up to ask if she was alright. She replied that she was fine, but he insisted that she didn’t have to do anything she didn’t want to. that was the trouble though, she really wanted to, she was just afraid of failing.

It was hard to admit she was finally struck by the same insecurities he had held, especially after being so bold; but as always, he laid her fears to rest and so, she plucked up her Gryffindor courage and in the sultriest tone she could manage (slight waver and all), asked him to show her what he liked.

See, reading and watching materials related to sex were all well and good for educating oneself; but she didn’t know how he preferred to be touched. For her, it was naturally going to require some trial and error where her own hands weren’t involved, but it was more than a little daunting to deal with opposing anatomy, when she wanted so badly to be good at something she had never attempted. Easy to know; harder to do.

She certainly wasn’t one to expect perfection of him, or herself for that matter; but there was a lingering and underlying fear that if she was terrible at it, that she wouldn’t be able to convey just how much she loved him. They were compatible in so many ways, she didn’t want to be the one left behind in this.

So, she watched intently as he touched himself and took note of any changes in pressure or pace, watching him trying to learn what he reacted to best. It seemed asking had been beneficial for both of them; seeing him in such a state because of her was the ultimate confidence boost and she found her desire to touch him started to outweigh her own anxieties. She placed her hand over his and he stilled, letting her quite literally, get a feel for things. She ran her thumb over the tip of his cock and slid her hand down and back up, the same way he had demonstrated. She heard his breath hitch and she repeated the motion a few more times, before finding her resolve to do what she really wanted to.

Her next stroke down, she followed with kisses, before swirling her tongue over his flushed tip. He let out a low moan as she set a leisurely pace she had a feeling would practically kill him. She changed or added something new with each bob of her head. She liked the way he buried one hand in her hair and used the other to bite back another moan as she ran her tongue flat along the underside of his cock, all the while caressing gentle circles into the side of his hips. When she took him fully in her mouth again, she pressed down as far as she could manage without gagging, and he grabbed her free hand as he tried to stop himself from pushing further into her mouth. She had to admit she loved that he wasn’t stoic or particularly quiet; she quickly discerned the difference
between what drove him mad or teased him to the point of frustration, just from the sounds he made. Not to mention his whispered encouragements and endearments; he let her know exactly how she made him feel and she adored it.

She could tell he was getting close by the way his breathing pattern changed. Watching the rise and fall of his chest as he tried to remember to breathe was almost mesmerizing as she quickened her pace.

He warned her when he was about to come, and she redoubled her efforts. He tried his best to form words to tell her she didn’t have to; she simply shook her head a little and pressed on. She wanted to taste him, wanted to drag every. Last. God. Damn. Moment of his release out, wanted to hear him moan as he spilled in her mouth. She got what she wanted, and she felt empowered by it… Oh, and she was still holding his hand.

Funnily enough, the only thing on her mind when Draco pulled her up to snog her senseless, despite her protests that she had just finished sucking him off, was that Lavender-Bloody-Brown had been wrong. It just took the right man to show her that she was every bit a woman.

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She was resplendent. There were a trillion other words he could use to describe the witch who had his heart in her hands, among other things; but none seemed so fitting. Her hair was mussed, her cheeks were flushed, and she had the most wonderfully prideful smirk on her face as she let him pull her back up to shower her with feverish kisses. She valiantly tried to protest, reasoning that he shouldn’t want to because she still tasted of him. He couldn’t have cared less. She was perfect, and his and there was nothing in the world he wanted more than to give her everything.

He was rather impressed with his own restraint. He had managed to stave off his climax for much longer than he had thought possible and it seemed his witch was not only a quick study but had an instinct for drawing out his pleasure. Every time he had thought he was about to tip over the edge and find his release, she had eased off or changed what she was doing; only to build him back up and do the same again. It was torture, but he loved it; *I’m definitely a bit of a masochist.* he thought.

He was immensely proud of her for overcoming whatever intrusive thoughts that had taken the wind out of her sails. Who was he to expect anything more of her than what she deemed she could handle? Sex wasn’t supposed to be perfect, though he had thoroughly surprised himself in applying collected advice and knowledge and having it actually be effective first try: However, he knew that wasn’t always the case.

Frankly, if she had asked, he would have stopped right then and just held her, if that’s what she wanted; he understood how daunting it was. Her reassurance had been so unexpected, he had almost made a right mess when she asked if she could watch him. He hadn’t realised how determined she was to reciprocate and knowing she was watching him was a previously undiscovered turn on.

The second she had brushed his hand away to take over he was utterly lost. If her small, soft hand wrapping around his length was paradise… her mouth had him thinking he had died and gone to heaven. It seemed experimentation and enthusiasm was all either of them needed; she used the same technique of trial and error to figure out what would send him toppling over the edge and he didn’t mind it one bit. that was the benefit of two people giving themselves to one another he supposed; they were both nervous and awkward and inexperienced, but it didn’t matter as long as they felt
something for each other.

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He was broken out of his musings when she ran her fingertips gently down the length of his spine. He knew he was still a few minutes off being ready to go again, but there was nothing stopping him from seeing how close to the edge of pleasure he could push her. This time he rather wanted to watch and learn himself.

Mouthing at her neck and shoulder he left a bruise or two in the wake of his attentions. He slipped a hand between them and felt her heart jump when he stopped short of his destination; a benefit to being pressed so close together. Teasing seemed to be something they both liked, he almost laughed when he realised the irony; he sat up and leant against the headboard before coaxing her to sit between his knees and lean her back against his chest. He brushed her hair to the side showering her exposed skin with gentle kisses. Eventually, he stopped and rested his chin on her shoulder, his view was exquisite as his eyes traced her curves. Wrapping his arms around her bare torso, he squeezed her lovingly, before whispering his request in her ear.

She let out a small sound of satisfaction when he called her sweetheart and her hand snaked down between her legs. He could feel the heat of her blush and he held his lips against the juncture of her neck and shoulder, not exactly kissing her, but just letting her know that he was aware she needed comfort.

The way his arms were wrapped around her allowed him to feel every expansion of her ribs as she drew breath. Every deep intake was met with an equal exhalation that caused her breasts to move in the most hypnotic way.

Looking down over her shoulder he was at just the right angle to be able to see what she was doing. Keeping an eye out for any particular little motions or flicks he would need to remember for future reference, he let himself enjoy the sight of her physical crescendo. He never had any intention of letting her finish that way, but it had more than given him the time he needed.

Staying her hand, he asked her to face him. She turned straddled his hips, a low hiss escaping him when she rocked against him. Clearly, she knew exactly what his intentions were and he could feel the warmth of her core as she sought pressure. As though she were a magnet he pulled her as close to himself as he could and encouraged her to take control from there. He heard her mutter a lubrication charm and he had to thank Merlin for her forethought, sometimes he really loved magic.

Not that he wanted to think of anyone but Hermione, he supposed he ought to thank Blaise at some point for putting the idea of Hermione riding him into his head; it had the added benefit of letting her dictate the pace while fulfilling his own particular fantasy.

She rocked against him once or twice more and seemed to decide that she simply couldn’t wait. Supporting her a little when she shifted her weight, she ran the tip of his cock down the length of her slick folds before sinking slowly down onto him. He smiled seeing the same expression she usually had when she was concentrating on reading applied to her adjusting to his size. He felt her relax and slip a little further down; he ran his hands up her thighs in an attempt to soothe her when she winced, but he quickly realised it wasn’t needed; she took her time and before he knew it she had managed to take all of him, right down to the hilt.

She leant down and pressed a surprisingly chaste kiss to his lips before moving her hips in a way that made him drop his head back into the wooden headboard with a resounding thump. She heard it and immediately stopped, he wanted to die when she did.
Her hands flew to his face and with both hands she lifted his head, asking if he was alright. He reached up and gingerly felt around for the small bump on the crown of his head. With a low growl of annoyance, he replied;

“I'm fine, sounded worse than it was.”

She smiled and moments later he was met with the most amazing sensation as she began to laugh while he was still inside her, he joined her and pretty soon they were both feeling better; her nerves seemed to vanish, and the dull ache of his injury was forgotten. She quickly resumed her rhythm and seemed more comfortable, picking up her pace. On her next downward movement he arched up to meet her and she let out a quiet whine, he did it again and he could feel her clench around him. She was impossibly tight, and the way she would almost release him, only to slide back down and hold him deep within her, drove him wild.

While sex had always seemed somewhat baseless, he now knew better; they were with each other the whole way, connected and aware of the other’s needs. It was always going to be this way.

He could tell by her expressions that she wasn’t too far off reaching her peak and he figured he would be following after her sooner than expected. She was holding him tight and he could feel the slight sting of her nails pressing into his shoulders. He shifted a little and changed his angle just slightly and- Merlin’s beard! he wasn’t expecting her to cry out. Thinking he might have hurt her, he stopped and she let out a frustrated huff before completing his motion for him, slamming her hips down with more force than he would have expected. ‘ok, not hurt then…” he thought absentmindedly.

She sped up again and the added friction felt amazing, pushing up into her, he was gradually growing more erratic as he drew closer to completion. While they had started out slow and tentative, they had already made immense progress and it meant he was now well on the way to finishing first, which he simply would not have (though his body would betray him). Reaching between them, he found her clit and copied her circling motions from earlier. That seemed to work, and she faltered a little.

Each pass over her most sensitive place won him little moans and gasps; it was as though he was competing with himself to see what he could draw from her next. However, the moment his name passed her lips, it seemed she had won... He warned her, and she simply kept her pace, told him she was on the potion and took him as deep as she could. The band of his restraint snapped soon after and he felt that familiar, blissful throb as he came deep inside her. Still teasing her clit, he felt her following him over the edge, watching her come apart above him as she had watched him moments before.

She stayed where she was for a while, just holding him and pressing light kisses to his jaw and collarbone. Eventually, she climbed off and after he muttered a quick scourgifiy, he slid down beside her and pulled her flush against his chest. Listening to the roaring of his own pulse, juxtaposed with her slow breaths he fell asleep thinking he would never let her go.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

feel free to leave me some feedback, suggestions, or whatever - it really makes my day and I love getting back to all of you :) Or just leave a kudos if that's not your style, they
never cease to make me smile :)
till next time
xo Em
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Draco's pov, no warnings for this one, maybe a little bit of swearing but who's worried about that.

also i completely forgot to update the rating on this so that will also be getting done

Chapter Notes

Ok first off, thanks so much to everyone who left comments on the last chapter, its so appreciated; you guys saved me a mini panic attack over exiting my carefully constructed box and even though I stressed about the chapter I really enjoyed writing it so, I will do more in future :)

I'm really excited to get this chapter up and I hope you all like it.
xo em

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

The first thing Draco did when he woke the next morning was feel for the sore spot on the back of his head. Reassuring himself it was there with a wince, he knew the events of the night before hadn’t been a dream; though he probably should have checked his state of dress if he really wanted to know. Oddly this was the first time waking up in her bed that he wasn’t terribly worried about the whole morning wood issue, He glanced at his watch and found that he had completely forgotten last night had been Christmas Eve.

Feeling the chill of the crisp early morning air, he settled back under the covers making sure he didn’t wake Hermione. She was still beside him and he had to stifle a chuckle at how ridiculous her hair looked, there was a small flicker of pride knowing that he had a hand in it (literally and metaphorically). He found it funny that she had fallen asleep so quickly after and he loved that she was curled into his side with an adorable half-smile; looking every bit the cat who got the cream. Thankfully, the fact she was still fast asleep gave him a little time for reflection before the insanity of Christmas took hold.

oOo

He certainly hadn’t expected her to jump him, sure things had been hot and heavy in the kitchen before Potter waltzed in, but he hadn’t thought she was that ready. He had to admit, it felt like they had overcome the biggest hurdle between them (excluding his father), sex was something they had talked about once or twice since getting together and if the bump on his head was anything to go by, it ended up being exactly as she had said; imperfect. He wouldn’t have had it any other way. They had been lucky things went as well as they had. He had a feeling being older and somewhat knowledgeable on the subject, despite not having practised it, had some bearing on the success of
Their first time.

It didn’t lessen the anxiety, but at least they both knew what might help the other get through. It was why he hadn’t been worried about her pulling back. He could tell her nerves had slowly been building and he was never going to pressure her; it didn’t stop him from being immensely glad she chose to continue. He liked the fact that they supported and encouraged each other as much as they had, it made the whole experience so much easier to judge; she gave him tips and vice versa, if either needed to move a certain way or change something, the communication was there. He had this idea that sex was difficult, in reality, he had a feeling he had simply made it into a much bigger deal than it was, the older he got and the more he read or heard.

Not that he didn’t have a million more questions about it than he started off with… well maybe not millions, he wasn’t completely clueless.

He was just surprised it could be as simple as it was and still be so amazing. It probably hadn’t helped that he hung around Blaise and Theo, they had chased more than their fair share of witches; Theo wasn’t so bad, he’d slept around a bit and had relatively decent advice, though it was often lost amongst his teasing regarding Draco’s apparent reluctance: and he knew Blaise wasn’t someone who should be treated as an example, but it was damn hard not to listen to him when he started talking technicalities (even if it was more than a little vulgar at times). He figured that the impression sex was so wildly overcomplicated had come from them; how was he supposed to know before now.

She started to stir, and he watched her do much the same as he had; looking at her surroundings and getting her bearings as she woke. With a mumbled good morning she scooted closer and draped herself over him, muttering something about how snakes were supposed to be cold-blooded.

Thoroughly trapped, he had no desire to free himself. He pressed a kiss into her riotous mass of chestnut curls and pulled her closer.

“Merry Christmas sweetheart.”

That seemed to jolt her out of her still dreamy state.

“It’s Christmas! I hadn’t even realised!”

“You’ve had a lot on your mind, if it makes you feel better I didn’t know either.”

“I know, but I expected I’d be so much more aware of it. Guess I found a pretty good way to get my mind off it.”

He resisted the urge to smirk, knowing that right now she was likely more than a little emotionally confused. He eyed her cautiously as she set about getting up and dressed, it was so mundane, but he found it erotic all the same. He followed and found her downstairs placing a few small, neatly wrapped boxes under the tree. He watched for a moment and retreated to the kitchen to start breakfast. That was where she found him.

A rather pleasant side effect of their newfound intimacy was that neither wanted to lose contact with the other. She held onto him as he cooked breakfast, her arms wrapped around his waist, chest pressed against his back and moving in tandem; later, he decided to forgo the use of his knife to hold her hand while they ate; she didn’t seem to mind doing the same.

Letting the day take them where it may, he could tell that she was hiding how devastated she was being home for Christmas without her family. When he spied the tags on the few gifts she had
previously placed under the tree, it felt like a dementor had entered the room and sucked all the joy out; even if the situation had been different, he knew how it felt to miss someone at Christmas. His sad childhood was nothing compared to what she had to be going through, but he couldn’t shake the comparison of gifts filled with hope, left unopened under the boughs of a different pine tree in a different time.

Whiling away the afternoon together, he found he rather liked listening to stories of her childhood antics and it seemed to help her cope to tell someone her stories and share memories only she held dear. He was captivated as she told him about the first time she used magic, how she was terrified of losing her first tooth, her first time ice skating, and how much she loved her family’s trips to France, soon followed by the time she learned the f-word while rhyming, her first time in Diagon Alley and the time she had her tonsils out.

The common denominator in all those stories was naturally her parents. The way they supported her, took care of her, loved her… He couldn’t imagine how it had to feel to take that away from yourself.

The day dragged on and soon it was late afternoon. She had only cried once or twice, and he admired the strength it must have taken to keep herself so together. He did his best to give her whatever comfort he could without smothering her. Slowly the sadness seemed to creep out of the air as they found small ways to make the day their own.

Exchanging gifts had proven an excellent distraction; he had been surprised that she knew he needed a new set of quidditch arm guards, and he rather liked that she’d charmed his initials into the leather in silver script. He’d also received a knitted scarf (green of course so he could wear it to class) and quite a few books; considering who his girlfriend was, the last one was to be expected. He loved that she tried to hide her smile watching him fuss over the novels she had picked. Her offhanded comment about the Weasel being crestfallen after receiving a book one Christmas, had him feeling so incredibly glad she hadn’t settled for the red headed idiot, she was truly the greatest gift. They may not have had the best beginnings, but at least he appreciated every little thing about her.

After presenting her with his own well-hidden boxes, he found he was the one enjoying her reactions. He had been hanging on to a few of them for some time. Their first trip to Hogsmeade he had come across a quill he knew would be perfect for her, it wasn’t overly flashy, but it had an elegantly engraved pattern running up from the nib, disappearing into the down at the end of the feather. His other gifts followed the same train of thought as hers: Books.

Oddly enough, he had found a very early copy of her favourite novel tucked away in the Manor’s library and seeing her face as she opened the well-worn copy of Pride and Prejudice was priceless.

Another old book that had been kicking around was a first edition copy of Hogwarts: A History. He knew she carried a copy with her in that highly illegal beaded bag and he loved that on occasion he would catch her reading it (even if it did mean she was having a bad day and was likely to be rather snarky). It wasn’t being read at the Manor, so he decided it should be put to better use. Besides, he knew she wasn’t the type to want over the top gifts, she wasn’t materialistic that way and he really liked that about her; she knew he had money and she just didn’t care, she told him that she would have loved him as a pauper or a prince (he hadn’t quite got the reference, but he liked the tale she told as she explained it). He knew then that she preferred heartfelt, simple things, things that had a story. He hadn’t realised that was what he wanted to give her until he looked back at how impersonal the gifts his father would give his mother were.

His last gift was something more than a little coincidental after listening to her stories all afternoon. He’d planned it not long after the first inter-house drinking night and he hoped that with a few good concealment charms they might still be able to make use of the ice skating rink he had booked for
He handed her an envelope with the time and address and he suddenly felt slightly self-conscious about his calligraphy skills, his inner voice mocking him with the phrase ‘Your pureblood is showing!’ much to his own amusement.

He had never really seen the personification of someone’s face lighting up like Christmas, he thought it was a rather stupid idiom, until he watched it happen in front of him. The excitement sweeping across her features was more exaggerated than Harry telling her he planned on proposing to Ginny.

She leapt across the floor and knocked him over as she crushed him against her chest. He was trapped, unable to move and god damn she was strong; he just wanted to hug her back, but she held tighter and pinned his arms to his sides. It quickly turned into a play fight (one which he was letting her think she was winning). Laughing and rolling around on the floor was positively childlike and he supposed maybe he spoke too soon, saying that he was glad no one was there to see her pin him under her in a way that was rather pleasantly reminiscent of the previous night; sticking with the Christmas analogy, the gift no one wanted had arrived in the form of an interrupting Weasel.

“What in the ever-loving fuck is going on here!!!”

Hermione’s head snapped toward the intruder and he saw her pale at the sight of the insufferable redhead.

She moved off him and extended a hand to pull him off the floor as he stood he realised she was sporting rather a few uncovered hickeys, he did his best to nonchalantly move her hair to cover what he could. In hindsight, it didn’t really help that much, but she mouthed a silent ‘thank you’ anyway. It seemed the evening just got interesting.

He turned to Hermione with a playful smirk and then back to a rather stunned-looking Weasley…’Oh, this was going to be fun’ he thought sarcastically.

“Mione, what is it with your mates barging in? you’ve lived with them, have they ever heard of owling?”

Weasley sputtered and Draco was rather expecting an indignant tap from his girlfriend but instead received a grin that told him all he needed to know about how pissed off she was and how well she would have fitted into Slytherin.

“I don’t know; Ron, have you ever heard of owling? You know, it’s a rather revolutionary thing where you can warn someone that you intend on entering their house uninvited. While they’re in hiding no less.”

“UNINVITED!”

The glare Hermione shot Weasley saw him quiet his tone before continuing

“...Since when have I ever been uninvited? I came here because I didn’t want you to spend Christmas without your family. I tried to give you time, but I wanted you to know someone cared that you were stuck in your old house with this git, so here I am.”

He watched as she pinched the bridge of her nose and heard her mutter a few choice words under her breath then something about the emotional range of a teaspoon.

“Merlin’s arse… Ron, you can’t just... ugh, look; it’s not about being uninvited, it’s about respect… Jesus, I can’t beli- You can’t just come barging in without warning a person, it's not polite and if
you were seen you could very well have given our position away! then what, I spend another holiday on the run? Or say I heard you come in and hexed you thinking you were one of Luci’s? or Draco did?”

“Oh, so he’s Draco now? you two more than friends or something? Because that would be utterly perverse. You could do better.”

He couldn’t help the snort at Hermione’s slip in referring to his father, he wondered if they had taken to calling him that during the war. Then he caught what was on the tip of her tongue, hanging unsaid and he choked on that all too familiar shame as he recalled Easter.

But Draco knew the Weasel was taunting Hermione and he was about three seconds from decking the prat after he saw the look on her face; but he knew Hermione could handle herself, so he decided to enjoy watching her rip shreds off Weasley, while he kept his arms wrapped supportively around her waist (with a secondary purpose of stopping her attacking her friend, though why he was doing the Weasel any favours was beyond him).

“You know what Ronald, we are.”

“Are what?”

“Together, a couple, in a relationship, courting...whatever you want to call it. I wasn’t planning on breaking it to you like this, but you are being a right fucking arsehole, so this is what you get, and before you start; yes, Harry knows; we told him yesterday, he was relatively fine with it; so, why can’t you be?”

“Because it’s the Ferret! Honestly ‘Mione I can’t just set aside all the shit he’s put us through, he was rotten then and you can’t just un-rot yourself: I know it’s not a proper word! but you get what I mean. How can you be with him, let alone stand there and act like you’ve forgiven him? Explain; because I honestly don’t get it.”

“Because I’m not acting. I forgave him, I moved on. Have I forgotten; no, will I give him shit about it in future; I don’t know, I guess I’ll try not to... but I at least gave him the chance to earn it. Which is what I expect from you.”

Draco decided now might be the time to add his two sickles worth, considering he was the one that didn’t like the Weasel, he assumed he might be in a better position to negotiate the terms of their armistice. Regrettably, he had to drop his usual insults for the sake of manipulation to achieve peace.

“You know what Ron, at the risk of my own neck, I’m going to contradict my lovely girlfriend on that last request. Don’t do what she asked.”

“What?”

“You heard me. Don’t do what she asked of you, don’t give me a chance; I told you before that it would be worth nothing coming from you. Why would I want the forgiveness or approval of someone I can’t respect?”

“Because... Because if you want to be with her you’ll need it, or she’ll end up hating you for ostracizing her from her family.”

“Really? Because from where I stand, she’s fit in perfectly with the snakes who are every bit my family, they adore her; even Pansy owled the other week asking us to bring her along to some fashion expo she’s hosting, said she wanted to meet the Granger from the wild stories she’d heard knocking about.”
She turned her face up to smile at him and his heart melted a little.

“She really said that?”

“Yep, I’ll tell you the details later, but first I need to finish this, with your permission.”

“I trust you.”

He knew that talking about someone like they weren’t there was one of the rudest things on earth, but it was the Weasel, so he didn’t mind if he offended him.

“Anyways… I can’t quite see how I’m ostracizing her? Not to mention I’m rather fond of a few of your fellow Gryffindors these days, they’ve gotten relatively used to us snakes hanging about in the lion’s den. Hell, I give your sister advice all the bloody time, just so she can deal with dating that clueless dolt you call a best friend. So, now that that’s understood, I want you to say what it is you’ve been itching to say all this time. Unfortunately for you, I’m both a Slytherin and intelligent, you’re not that hard to read; so, let’s see if you can pluck up that Gryffindor courage and say it to her face, because that’s what’s put the billywig in your bonnet over me… Go on.”

He watched the confirmation of his assumption cross Weasley’s face. Instead of feeling jealous or possessive he found himself pitying him. Somewhere between their last conversation in Hogsmeade and now (leaning more toward now), Draco realised that Weasley was still in love with Hermione. It was easy to miss, considering he was photographed snogging Lavender Brown every other week, but it was there. Sure, he wasn’t wild about it, but he knew Hermione deserved the truth regarding why her ex continued to act like such a prick.

He could see Weasley mulling the idea over and he itched to make a bet on how long it would take him, but now was not the time for antics. If he could make Weaselbee open up, maybe Hermione could have her cake and eat it too and he wouldn’t be the reason she lost another person she cared for. Though it annoyed him to no end having to go through the same shit they did when Weasley found out they were just friends.

When the Weasel finally spoke up it was stuttered, and half gritted out, but he told the truth. He felt Hermione lean into him for support as Weasley spouted off about how he had loved her for ages, about how he messed up, wanted her back, but had to see her finding happiness with the wrong man when he was right there, waiting to be seen.

He didn’t feel jealous, he didn’t sneer, didn’t smirk, or snort, or laugh at how cheesy some of the lines were. He just felt sorry for him. ‘fuck I must have come a long way to be feeling bad for this git.’ He thought.

Hermione took it in her stride. While he could tell she was surprised by the extent, she seemed more than aware there may have been more than friendly inclinations lingering in his mind. He had to admit he was glad that she shut it down as logically as she did. It didn’t mean it wasn’t one hell of an awkward conversation to be party to, but it was oddly nice to know that she had his back, it was all too easy to start with the ‘I’m not good enough, let someone else make her happy, because she’ll have it easy’ bit. He was right where he wanted to be, he was convinced she was too and he wasn’t about to give up when he had everything.

He listened as Weasley and Hermione argued and if he wasn’t watching it happen in front of him, it would have made for a great movie. Weasel would attempt to make a point and Hermione would beat him back with logic, bad language and sheer will. It took bloody ages, but it seemed that she wasn’t making progress. Unfortunately, things were no longer in his hands; he had to watch as Weasley refused to give in and she was forced to keep her word; ordering one of her oldest friends
out of her house and out of her life, until he could come to terms with who she was dating and the fact that he was just too late.

He didn’t care if Hermione looked resolved and put together… he found himself following the Weasel out. Before he could disapparate, Draco grabbed his collar and let his fist fly. He had considered a lovely little hex his mother had taught him, but he figured a punch would literally have a bit more impact.

Weasley scrambled for his wand and pointed it at Draco’s chest, blood running down his lip. Rather than go on the defensive, he opened his posture and bowed slightly as he plastered on a smirk that he hoped hid how much he hated the entire situation, he never broke eye contact. He was inviting Weasley to take a shot; Weasley held his position and after a few long seconds, lowered his wand in defeat. Draco folded his arms and shook his head; it was weird to feel disappointed in someone he hated.

“I warned you what would happen last time… I also warned you what I would do if you hurt her: and you pick today of all fucking days… So, you best go figure yourself out and come back with a damn good apology; and maybe think about letting Lavender know that you’re stringing her along. Even a Death Eater like me knows that’s cruel.”

Weasley disapparated without another word, off to lick his wounds. Draco took a deep breath before going back inside to see what state Hermione was in.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter should be up in the next few days, they're coming out a bit longer than usual but that's never a bad thing.

please feel free to leave me some feedback or just drop a kudos, it makes my day when i see stuff to reply to in my inbox :)

till next time
x o Em
Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

ok, I have upped the rating on this fic because there will be future smut among the plot. I had so much fun challenging myself to write chapter 20 I couldn't resist.

chapter warning for a little lemon ;)

Chapter Notes

hope you all like this chapter, its a little bit of a filler- dealing with Ron aftermath and these two trying to unburst the bubble he popped.

so I just had to have Hermione take Draco on a super cute muggle date (before they go ice skating), which will span two days and two chapters, because nothing good is ever open on boxing day (I had to extend things a little).

enjoy
xo Em

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

How she got through Ron’s tirade without shedding a tear, she had no idea. It wasn’t as though Hermione wasn’t upset, she just couldn’t bring herself to feel sorry for him when she had to keep her word and kick him out. She had to wonder if this situation was what Draco had managed to diffuse last time.

She had called his bluff by following through, it was so wildly unfair to Draco to let Ron get away with what he was attempting to do, there was little choice. She’d had some idea how Ron felt in the aftermath of their breakup, she hadn’t expected him to pull the same stupid shit he did in fourth year. Dating Lavender to make her jealous, could he be more juvenile? How dare he waltz in and expect her to take him back just because he admitted to loving her. She had moved on, she thought he had moved on; only to be dragged right back into his drama.

Then there were the awful things he said about Draco. Ron seemed to think he stood a chance at convincing her his opinions were correct by screaming them at the top of his lungs. It was slow progress helping Draco change the way he viewed himself and Ron may have undone all her hard work in one fell swoop.

Draco was more sensitive than he liked to let on, it was a side of him he hated showing but she saw it as one of his greatest strengths, it was how they were able to find common ground. He had an innate ability to put himself in her shoes and react accordingly. She knew that the guilt of her decision would be crushing for him.
Still in shock after sending Ron out, she hardly registered Draco had followed. Pulling herself together, she waited for him to come back inside hoping he wouldn’t do anything rash. Moments later she spotted his wand on the kitchen bench and despite knowing he was adept at wandless magic, she felt her anxiety spike at the thought of him being unable to properly protect himself. She noted that she was more worried about Ron hurting Draco than the reverse and that spoke volumes about how much Ron had broken her trust.

She wasn’t one to let someone fight her battles for her, but she knew Draco wasn’t going to let Ron get away with disrespecting her. It was a guy thing she wasn’t about to get in between, she didn’t even need to take their lifelong rivalry into account; she knew better than to assume that would be enough to rile him up on its own. She felt so disenchanted with her friend it was almost unbearable, how he could be so insensitive and cruel was beyond her; and to abuse his privileges as a friend was inexcusable.

She hated that the day had come to this; just as she was starting to feel there might be some joy to be had... She wouldn’t have minded Ron dropping in, it was the way he spoke to her that just set her blood on fire; the little voice in her mind commentating their argument like a boxing match.

She was still replaying things in her mind when Draco came back in. She watched as he studied her and saw his surprise as he reached the conclusion that she was doing better than he would have expected. He was respecting her space, ‘god love him’ and reached out a hand for her to take in her own time. She didn’t say anything about the bruises blooming under the pale skin of his knuckles, or the blood that couldn’t possibly be his. She muttered a scourglify and kissed the bruise before pulling him into a tight embrace. He held her tentatively at first and she realised he was waiting for her to get mad at him.

“Well that’s not going to bloody happen…” she squeezed him tighter and he seemed to get that she just wanted him to hold her.

He held her like she was the last thing tethering him to the earth and she could feel uncertainty seeping in. She felt her apology build and it was hanging in the air between them before she registered she had spoken aloud. He looked down at her with unabashed astonishment.

“What on earth are you sorry for? I’m the one that should be sorry. I’m the reason you’re having these issues, the reason your relationship with two most important people in your life is strained; and Merlin- I hit him; I hit him so hard… and I just ended up hurting myself because I knew it would hurt you that I did it- I don’t know, am I making sense? I just couldn’t stand there and let him question your sanity again, the look on your face I- it broke me to see you have to do that, I can’t help but feel responsible, but Circe knows he got what he deserved, and it felt so righteous and wrong at the same time. Here I am caught between being ashamed of letting him get the better of me, being proud of myself for punishing him and wanting to beg your forgiveness because he’s practically your brother and I don’t have the right to assume you wanted me to hurt him for hurting you.”

“You’re making sense Draco, and I know how easy it is to lose your rationality, but if you hadn’t hit him I would have done worse. You seem to forget, I love you and that means I’ll support you even when it’s my best friend I have to stand up against. Please don’t let this undo everything we’ve been working towards, I can’t see you go back to doubting yourself at every turn. As much as I wish we could have stayed in that wonderful bubble a while longer; nothing will ever come easy to us, I knew it from the start, but I wanted you, more than anything; so, I can’t complain about it now that I have you… And I am not letting you go. Yes, Ron is family in every way but blood, but that doesn’t mean I’m wearing rose coloured glasses, I couldn’t stand the things he said about you; it was complete bollocks and maybe it makes me sound heartless, but I was fucking happy to kick him out because if he said another word, he might have found my fist crammed down his throat on your behalf.”
“I hate that he put us on the spot like that, I hate that you had to be the one to force his admission out into the open because I was too blind to realise he hadn’t let me go, I hate that he’s made me choose, I hate that I had to see that side of him, I hate that you haven’t had the chance to meet the Ron I know and love, because that’s not him. Most of all I hate knowing that he lied about his feelings… It’s been over for almost a year, he moved on and so did I. Merlin knows, I’m so happy with you and that won’t change; but I’m so fucking annoyed that Ron couldn’t just accept that he missed his chance. He used his friendship and his feelings for me to torment you… so, anything you did he deserved. And next time take your fucking wand so I don’t have to worry about the strength of your wandless shield charm!”

She could see him absorb her speech and the way he lit up when she said she loved him, that she was happy with him was so wonderful she had to stop herself kissing him mid-rant. Now that she was done, well there wasn’t anything stopping her. She pulled him down and kissed him sweetly at first, building into something frantic and charged.

It had been such a long day already, she had wanted to spend it in peace, remembering her parents and it had ended in violence. She supposed she ought to be miserable over Ron, but she knew that first; following through would teach him an important lesson and second; he would eventually come back with an apology and she would eventually forgive him. Besides, everyone he would think to vent to was already well aware or friends with the Slytherins, and she knew he wouldn’t want to be left behind once he realised that Draco and by extension Blaise, Theo (and apparently Pansy) were now part of their little makeshift family.

Curled up together reading their new books was an excellent way to salvage what remained of the day, but she had one or two things she wanted to ask Draco. She could tell there was still something on his mind and she wasn’t quite sure if it had to do with her, Ron or his father. He just looked more worried than usual.

Putting herself out on a limb and asking the first question was always a little hard, but he had once told her that for two people with anxiety dating, it made it easier when she asked; rather than holding onto the question and causing undue issues.

For once, her instinct was wrong; he wasn’t worried about what she had assumed, he was thinking up spells they could use to go ice skating undetected, reasoning that a little fun was just what they needed. It was so incredibly sweet, she knew she was likely sitting there grinning like an idiot, the rest of her questions were quickly forgotten and replaced with; ‘How did I get so lucky?’

It still amazed her that she had fallen for him so quickly (though her years of pining may have helped things along on her end). They’d had their share of issues in the past, but she couldn’t imagine her life without him. It made her think about what her life might have been like if he hadn’t returned to Hogwarts. Would they still have ended up here? If fate was a real being she would want to thank them; because the answer she reached was; No. They probably would have passed like ships in the night, and he would never have known how she felt. She wouldn’t have moved on right away, but he might have accepted an arranged marriage if he thought he’d had no chance; it killed her to think of him being with someone else, but after imagining it, she understood why he had tried to turn her away for her own apparent good. Ultimately, she would do anything to make him happy, but she couldn’t escape the feeling that without each other, neither of them ever would have been. The fact that their lives had crossed paths, instead of running parallel would never cease to make her infinitely joyful.
These thoughts were still running through her mind when she decided to let him know just how much she appreciated him. She hadn’t really had the chance to consider the fact their first time had occurred in her childhood bedroom, apparently their second was going to be on the living room couch. She took great pride in his reactions to her touch and watching him come undone was already one of her favourite things (she had to stop herself from making a ‘Sound of Music’ joke at the thought). He had stopped her before he reached his climax and turned his attention to her. She was admittedly still a little sore; naturally, he was a complete gentleman about it. She had a feeling once they were past the learning stage, she would rather like something other than slow and sweet, for now, it was their training wheels. She let him take the reins and it seemed it had been a sheer cliff of a learning curve. She had to resist the urge to give fifty points to Draco Malfoy for paying attention, because he was touching her exactly how she liked, and she was in heaven. He slipped easily inside her and that slight ache stopped mattering; it didn’t take long for either of them to find completion.

She found it immensely funny that after casting a cleaning spell they stayed on the lounge haphazardly dressed, with their hair in such a state; just watching a movie and eating dinner as though nothing had happened.

**oOo**

Boxing day started the same way Christmas day had. She woke up to the sight of their clothing scattered about the room after round two had gotten underway. It seemed neither of them could get enough of each other, and it certainly wasn’t a novelty. Or maybe it was? She would gladly never leave her bed again, so long as he was in it (sans nightmares of course).

But hunger eventually drove them to find their clothes and head downstairs. They spent the day how Christmas should have been. Around noon she got a letter from Ginny telling her she had ‘the news to end all news’ and after showing it to Draco they laughed at the thought of Harry keeping Ginny so occupied, she couldn’t write till now.

For the first time in days, they left the house. Casting disillusionment charms on themselves and ones to cover any footprints, they slipped out the back door and walked from Primrose Hill, through Regent’s park to the tube station. Mixing into the city crowd, they removed the charms and went through the gates to the underground. Draco was looking a little peaky and she recalled he hated enclosed spaces. Feeling immensely guilty, she pulled his arm and offered to walk if he didn’t want to deal with the claustrophobia.

“No, its fine, it’s not the Underground that bothers me, it’s actually the train. It’s nothing like the Hogwarts express and I kind of hate it.”

She wiped the surprised expression off her face and he started to laugh. She didn’t want to make him feel that she was being disrespectful, but she found herself laughing with him.

“But that makes no sense, it’s so illogical?”

“I know it is, but so is your fear of flying.”

Well, he had her there, she never could quite get over the whole flying thing. They heard the train before it arrived and once they were on, she held onto him instead of the rail, she was tall enough to reach but short enough that it was uncomfortable, and she much preferred clinging onto him instead of cold metal.

It was still early, and their session time wasn’t until later in the evening, so she promised him a proper muggle date (they hadn’t had much of a chance to do ‘couples things’ so she took the opportunity while she had it). They wandered hand in hand through the city admiring the architecture. They
found a quiet restaurant and removed their disillusionment charms for a short time. Enjoying each other’s company, they talked and ate, and she found he was more comfortable in the muggle world than she had initially expected. They paid their bill and continued to walk, eventually finding a cinema.

“Do you want to go in?”

“Well, you are taking me on a quintessential muggle date, so I think it’s rather fitting.”

“I think, considering what I have planned for tomorrow, seeing the Prince of Egypt will be more than fitting.”

They went up to the ticket booth arm in arm; the old woman who served them had them both blushing furiously, fussing over what a cute couple they made and how adorable their children would be.

Both beet red and holding back giggles, they rushed through the theatre doors and took their seats in the mostly empty theatre. Draco was struggling to restrain his mirth and well, she wouldn’t be Hermione Granger if she didn’t ask why.

“That’s the first time anyone’s ever said anything about my future kids being cute; I just got a glimpse into how embarrassing it would be if I had a family who cared less about heirs and more about adorable grandkids. I wish I could take you home and have the portraits make those kinds of comments when they met you…”

“Well, that wasn’t funny, it's bloody sad, so why… Oh.’ she softened at the implication of him wanting to take her home to meet his family, he hadn’t asked because he didn’t want to put her through it.

“Mione, don’t look so glum; you have to see it from my perspective. Before the war, my mother would go on about me settling down and though I never knew my grandmothers, I know they would have gone on for hours about my duty as a Malfoy to continue the ever so honourable line. Which is a complete joke… That woman suggesting we’d have adorable children would have them rolling in their graves; so, it’s ok to laugh about it.”

“I suppose it might be a little funny… I mean you’re dating a mudblood, they’d be doing more than rolling in their graves, oh my; you’re in for one horrid afterlife for tarnishing the integrity of your line sleeping with the likes of me…”

She started to laugh in earnest and even though she realised her slip in calling herself mudblood when he flinched, he laughed at her honesty.

“If they weren’t already dead, it would kill them. Merlin’s beard, especially Abraxas.”

“Who’s Abraxas?”

“My Grandfather. A staunch pureblood elitist and the reason my family got tangled up with Voldemort in the first place.”

“I see. Well then, it’s a good thing none of them are here to have an opinion on me snogging you senseless before the movie starts.”

They both walked out of the cinema humming the main theme from the film. Draco was going on
about how inventive animation was. She had to wonder what wizarding films would look like if there ever were any produced, she could just imagine the Tales of Beedle the Bard on screen; it wasn’t a half bad idea… a wizarding cinema. She quickly discounted the idea when she realised that the likelihood of a biopic on Harry would be one of the first things made.

They caught a cab down to Somerset house, deciding it was far too cold to walk. They went in and grabbed their skates. Being on the ice took a little getting used to, it had been far too long since she had skated; but eventually, she found her balance and soon they were racing each other around the rink, trying not to knock anyone else over or catch the eye of the staff.

It was the most fun she’d had in ages. It was what she needed after grieving and dealing with Ron and everything else. She got to go on a proper date with her boyfriend and just enjoy the moment with no distractions. The best part was that there was more to do tomorrow. Eventually their session ended much to their dismay and she figured it would be best to apparate home, to save braving the cold night air.

She quickly realised that he hadn’t actually seen the exterior of her house until they apparated through the wards into her well-manicured front garden (last time had been a mad rush to make sure they were through undetected). She felt a little self-conscious as he looked around at the not so modest Georgian style house. Sure, the interior was spacious and modern, but looking at it from the front was so much more obvious.

She had grown up uncomfortable about the wealth her parents showed openly. Though she supposed that was one telltale sign of new money. He didn’t even flinch at the sight (she still did sometimes) and she had to wonder what he was thinking.

Once again, he caught her worries and laid them to rest with that quick wit she had come to adore.

“Guess I really don’t have to worry about my vault key around you then?”

She swatted his arm and he smiled at her. They went inside and the only other thing he said was that he would be modest about it too, if he didn’t have his last name to broadcast his wealth to the world. She knew he was telling the truth.

Far too exhausted for anything else, they showered and fell into bed. She was asleep before her head hit the pillow, though she was conscious enough to go seeking warmth. He wrapped an arm around her and she placed her hand under his shirt, pressing it against his skin as she moved herself closer.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

so part 2 of their cute af date will be up tomorrow :) I’ve written most of it, I just have to finish the chapter and edit :)

feel free to leave some feedback or a kudos, i love hearing from all of you and it is the highlight of my day seeing notifications in my inbox :)

till next time
xo Em
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

ok I am so sorry this took me an extra day to post but I couldn't seem to get the end quite right.

no real warnings for this chapter- unless you need me to warn for bad language and innuendos. otherwise its pretty tame.

Chapter Notes

Ok, plot is on the front burner again.
I've basically gone from virgins getting it on, to super cute muggle date to upcoming
dark af plot.
I'm riding this rollercoaster with you all right now. so im going to let the upcoming chapters speak for themselves.
enjoy
xo EM

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

Truth be told, Draco wanted to wake up next to her for the rest of his bloody life; even if the realisation somewhat shocked him. He didn’t care that his arm was trapped, or that he had pins and needles and a mouthful of her hair he would give anything to be as close as possible to her… He supposed that was part of the reason sex with her was already little bit religious, he couldn’t possibly get closer to her than in that moment; it was completely addictive.

He gently pulled her closer and the way she was resting gave him an unsettling view of her mudblood scar. They hadn’t really talked about such things since their first night making amends. He had eventually seen the rest of her scars and she had seen his. He never felt that she was repulsed by them, he had to wonder if she even saw them at all; he didn’t really see hers until all of a sudden, there they were.

The one Dolohov had given her in the department of mysteries was jarring to look at, it almost cut her in two. He added it to the list of times he almost lost this future, surviving that curse had to have been a miracle. Then there were the burns on her shoulder from the Gringotts dragon, well healed but still slightly visible, a testament to her bravery; the small circular scars over her chest and abdomen he knew were the remnants of the cruciatus and there were more that he didn’t know the tales of, but could tell were from the final battle. She had one scar he couldn’t deny liking, in a twisted way; three thin lines that matched his fingers, running down the back of her hand. Left behind when she had attempted to pull him onto her broom to escape Crabbe’s failed fiendfyre. He hadn’t meant to hurt her, it was rather an accident, but knowing that there was a mark on her skin that wasn’t violent in its creation was something he could live with; that scar showed her ultimate
compassion for someone who didn’t deserve it.

He liked lazy mornings with her by his side. She hadn’t had too many nightmares and he was glad that she had some respite. As long as she was sleeping peacefully he wouldn’t wake her, knowing she needed whatever she could get.

After their date yesterday, he was incredibly excited to see what she had planned for today, her little clues were tantalizing. After going through the morning in a haze, He helped her with her coat as they prepared to leave, once again under heavy disillusionment charms. As they walked through the park, she quietly told him stories of running about the castle under an invisibility cloak, it seemed to jog her memory and she laughed as she informed him that the ‘ghost’ attack in third year had been Harry having a little fun.

Of-fucking-course it was. He tried not to grimace at the sheer amount of embarrassing moments she had been privy to over the years. But it was comforting not to hear them discussed with ire (that little prank had been retaliation for calling her mu- No, muggleborn… he promised). He recalled what she had said to Weasley about trying not to bring it up and he felt gravity shift. He had known all along how horrid his behaviour had been, but to reminisce with her would never be pleasant; he hated that he couldn’t give her that.

“Hermione, how on earth are you with me? Merlin how can you even stand to be friends with me, let alone everything else”

“No, that’s not what this is about, it’s more wanting to understand you… I just- After everything I did, like that day in the snow at the shrieking shack… how did you ever find it in your heart to let it go, to say to Weasley that you would try not to lash out at me for it; how can you possibly love someone who tainted every memory we share? I don’t get how you can say you’ll try not to make me feel bad about it when you have every right to take it out on me?”

“Ok, well that’s a pretty valid question and you lied, it did have to do with Ron… but I don’t think you’re asking me how I can love you, Draco. I think you’re asking how you can love yourself. I moved on long before you came back into my life because I refused to hate anymore, you showed me I was right to do so. You told me you could help me learn to live with myself after my parents, but you haven’t realised I’ve been doing the same. I refuse to resent you for tainting memories; they aren’t that important anyway. What, you want to have a happy ‘this is how we met story’ to tell our future kids? Oh, Mummy and Daddy hated each other, but that’s ok because they’re a modern-day Romeo and Juliet- No! That was never going to be the case; but you know what, I’m not bitter about it because I have a letter tucked away in the top drawer of my bureau to show them, that proves how right I was to forgive you.”

He wondered if she realised how nonchalantly she had just talked about having children with him, like it was a perfectly mundane and acceptable topic for the train. The rest of her answer was quickly placed at the bottom of the pile in his mind as he attempted to shake off the shock. She didn’t appear to notice the slip at first, but her sheepish expression told him she was internally scolding her big mouth for betraying her brain. Honestly though, wasn’t he thinking he wanted forever just this morning. It seemed she was too, whether she realised it or not.

He did what any gentleman would do when a lady said something she wished she hadn’t (something he had learned from his mother), he pretended he didn’t hear it and soldiered on with his original topic, trying to ignore the burn in the tips of his ears as his brain presented him with little frizzy-
haired, towheaded monsters running around.

“So, you just decided not to resent me and here we are? I mean even on my best days the strength required not to kill me or berate me... I can’t even fathom how you do it, I can be a right arse; not to mention needy as fuck, I swear I should be re-sorted into Hufflepuff. Fucking hell I don’t think I’ll ever respect someone as much as you for sticking with me and my crazy frigging family.”

“Well, these days, the good days aren’t the ones where I don’t see you in the halls; they’re the days we pass notes in class, or hold hands under the table or read together in our common room…”

She leaned closer to whisper the next part and he tried not to shiver as her breath tickled his neck.

“Or, more recently; waking up naked and wonderfully sated with you in my bed. I usually don’t have the urge to kill you then; so, I’m willing to put up with the rest if it means keeping you.”

He choked on air when she kissed his neck, she was a witch in every sense of the word and he was resorting to boyish techniques to halt his arousal before he embarrassed himself. She affected him so intensely, he was down to the bottom of the barrel of unattractive thoughts.

‘That time you caught your parents in the study, Nope, too far…’

‘Professor Sprout and Slughorn. Nope, too far fetched…’

‘Fuck that won’t work, I never knew my grandmother…’

‘Voldemort; NOOPE! certainly not, where the fuck did that come from…’

‘Quidditch; yeah, that’s safe enough, … Falmouth Falcons, Chudley Cannons, Holyhead Harpies, Banchory Bangers: Well that isn’t working.’

‘Potions recipes: maybe I can bore it away? powdered moonstone, hellebore syrup, powdered porcupine quill and unicorn horn…’

He could feel the heat of his blush and she finally seemed to notice just how close he was to... well, who knew what he’d do. She pulled back and he could see her bite her bottom lip to stop herself from laughing at his somewhat strained expression.

“Did you just recite the recipe for a draught of peace to uhm... you know?”

If he had been blushing before, he was- the only thing coming to mind was the time he got sunburnt on holiday with his family in Spain, he had never been so red until now.

“Did I say that aloud?”

“Yep...I'm sorry, I didn’t think. But it is rather fascinating to know that’s how you manage in less than appropriate situations. Want to know something funny? ”

“Uh, sure?”

“Harry told me once that Ginny decided to play footsie under the table at the burrow and he resorted to thinking about Snape to help him through.”

“Eugh! Ok, that killed it for sure. Uncle Sev! Sweet Salazar why didn’t I think of that… Wait, I NEVER want to think of that. Merlin, Hermione why would you put that in my head?!”
“It worked didn’t it?”

Well shit, she was right. But that smirk almost got him going again.

oOo

They got off the train and she was in a fit of giggles, mostly due to the traumatized look he was still sporting. They walked out of the station and for a moment he felt eyes following them but saw no one out of the ordinary. Somewhat reassured, he found himself smiling too.

They walked for a few minutes and her cheeks and nose had gone the cutest shade of pink. He wished he wasn’t wearing gloves so he could run his fingers over the chill induced rouge. But he settled for pulling her a little closer and wrapping an arm around her waist as they walked; he loved that she did the same, holding on to the back of his coat.

For a cold London morning, it looked pretty busy as they joined the line at the British Museum. They had no issue occupying themselves as they stood and waited. What started as a cuddle ‘for warmth’ quickly led to him flinching as she unravelled his scarf and pressed her cold nose to his throat, kissing her way up before giving him a damn decent snog.

He liked that she could share her interests with him, and he was pretty sure that the way he got excited when she said ‘Museum’ had left her a little aroused, but it wasn’t quite enough payback for the train…he would have to remember for later. She had said that being in London, it was the perfect place to take a fellow swot like him. Well, she wasn’t wrong. Somehow in all his muggle explorations, he had never managed to find the time to do the more touristy things.

He had walked past it a few times and once they had gone inside he had to wonder why he had never bothered to go inside; it was truly amazing.

They spent ages looking through the cases and cases of artefacts and he could tell she wasn’t surprised he knew almost as much about their history as she did. reading was reading, and all history was important as his father had stressed.

He realised he’d made her a little hot under the collar when he told her one of the sarcophagi on display belonged to a witch; based on the symbols and scenes painted on the coffin. She stepped away to look at the next case and he heard her mutter;

“Bloody hell, His mind might be more attractive than he is.”

If that didn’t do wonders for his ego he would be lying.

Leaving the Egyptian sections, they wandered through the Greco-Roman exhibition and began discussing their favourite myths; his was Hades and Persephone and she listened as he explained that the tale was more complicated than the diluted version most people knew. He detailed how Hades had pursued Kore (later Persephone) because he had been enchanted by her. When Hades asked Demeter for Kore’s hand, the goddess refused Hades was left heartbroken, it was then that he decided to kidnap her. The rest of the tale remained virtually the same, though people often forget that Zeus and some of the other gods thought their union a good match. They walked slowly through the exhibit discussing the nature of the myth for a while before she told him her own.

Apparently, she had always loved the tale of the Trojan war, but it wasn’t her favourite. She told him all about seeing the statue of Perseus holding up the head of Medusa while on holiday in Florence and how she had been intrigued ever since. She didn’t really need to recount the tale, but she did anyway. Not to mention he loved listening to her. As they walked through the Elgin marbles she
talked about how she had always felt sorry for Medusa; cursed by Athena, forced to live in solitude, made out to be this evil villain when really, she was a victim.

“You know, I never really thought about her that way, but I see your point.”

“Perseus got all the glory for killing her when in reality, she wasn’t intentionally hurting anyone. There was nothing she could do about it.”

As she finished her sentence he hid a laugh, he hadn’t been certain until now but, he gave her right shoulder a nudge and he watched her realise there was a group of people standing a couple of meters away, trying to look as though they hadn’t been listening in on their discussion. (there was that strange feeling again like they were being watched from under a rock).

Resuming their conversation and speaking loud enough for the group to hear, they made their way through the marbles and the rest of the section with their shy audience as he tried to ignore the feeling something was horribly wrong.

They worked their way through the last exhibit, eventually managing to lose their unwanted tour group. Laughing as they walked out the main doors they recast their disillusionment charms, finding there was much less time to kill than expected. Leaving the Museum, the afternoon chill had them wrapping their coats tighter to keep in body warmth as they walked hand in hand to the nearest tube stop, headed for the National Gallery.

They chatted as they made the short journey and he liked not having to hide. Well, hide his emotions. It felt good to walk about unrecognized and just be a normal couple. But he still couldn’t ignore his instincts and as much as he hated to ruin what was a perfect day there was no denying something was very off. He gave her hand a firm squeeze before speaking.

“Mione, something’s wrong, keep close and have your wand ready.”

She nodded, and they pressed on as though everything was fine. They avoided deviating from their path and tried to get somewhere more populated. When he felt the familiar pressure of someone trying to break into his mind, he had to stop himself from grabbing her and apparating on the spot, statute of secrecy be damned. Their disillusionment charms made no difference now, whoever had found them obviously saw right through it… but how?

“Mione, I can’t tell where they are or how many, but if they move on us, I want you to get to Harry’s. I can’t get through the wards there on my own, but I can hold them off.”

“I’m not leaving you behind, we’ll side-along and I’ll take you through.”

“I need to see who’s after us, if I don’t, the Aurors won’t have any leads.”

“Draco that’s not your job, it doesn’t matter about leads.”

The way she hissed almost had him convinced as he continued to push her forward. He could feel the pressure in his head worsen and he knew whoever it was really wasn’t holding back now. It was bordering on painful and he tried to hide it as best he could. He pulled her into a back alley, knowing that there was no point trying to run.

“It does matter; my father is smart, whoever is trying to break into my mind has to be one of his and we won’t have another chance to identify a suspect until they decide to attack again, which could be much worse. So, I’m asking you to go because they won’t hurt me the same way they’ll hurt you.”

She didn’t have the chance to reply, he saw her eyes widen and felt a wand press into his back. He
knew all hell was about to break loose; He had a split second to nod and push her back, watching her form twist as she disapparated.

Whoever happened to be behind him, she had gotten a damn good look and gotten to safety. That was enough of a consolation in the face of whatever was coming next.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

I feel like the phrase "now we're getting somewhere" is wildly appropriate after that little cliffhanger :)

feel free to leave a kudos or some feedback, you guys and gals are keeping me going and are the ridikkulus to my writers block boggart :)


Hermione arrived at Grimmauld place with a façade of calm she didn’t think possible. She hadn’t wanted to leave Draco, but he was right; he couldn’t have seen Alecto Carrow behind him and certainly wouldn’t be in any position to get the information to the Aurors once he did.

‘How in the hell did she manage to see through our fucking charms?’

She almost tripped up the stairs in her haste to get inside and her mind was racing, trying to figure out why he had his back to the alley in the first place. ‘It was the dumbest of rookie mistakes, he bloody lived with the death eaters, of course he wouldn’t be so stupid as to turn his back on- oh Merlin! he pushed me back… he was putting himself between me and whatever was coming.’

She barely managed to open the door before she broke down in the hall. Calling out loud as she could, she hoped Harry would hear her. She could hear him running down the stairs and relief washed over her. Using that as her strength, she pulled herself together and stood before Harry helped her.

“Harry, you have to get to the ministry- you have to get me to the ministry.”

“What’s happened?!”

“We did something stupid, Alecto and god knows who else was following us, she could see through our invisibility charms I.”

“Fuck! where’s Malfoy?”

Harry didn’t need her to answer, her silence was enough to throw him into action. He slung on his coat and pulled his boots on before apparating her out of Grimmauld place and into the ministry.

Walking briskly down the corridor he pulled her into an office and she was met with a rather shocked Kingsley.
“Miss Granger, what on earth…”

Harry interrupted the Minster and she felt the shock seeping in as Harry started making plans.

Traces, tracking spells; what good would any of it do? She left him there with his wand and his wits without so much as a goodbye. What the fuck was she thinking, he wasn’t any better off with them than she was. As her mind worked the situation over, she noticed the Aurors on call now entering were all new faces, distrust started to creep in; she didn’t know any of them. Didn’t know where their loyalties truly lied, didn’t know how competent they were. She wasn’t leaving Draco’s life in their hands when the only people in the room she trusted included her best friend, the Minister and herself.

So, she started making her own plans. She would just have to let Harry in on them later and see what the Aurors came up with. The hardest part would be finding him. But she had an idea on how she might manage it.

oOo

‘Secrets of the Darkest Arts’ held more than just information on horcruxes and if she could manage to see Narcissa Malfoy, she might be able to complete a rather nasty piece of magic to find both Lucius and Draco. It wouldn’t be the first time she did something illegal for the greater good.

She excused herself from Kingsley’s office as other Aurors began to arrive to join the search. Feigning dizziness, she headed for the bathrooms before doubling back and apparating home. She knew it was dangerous to go out on her own, to go home at all; but she needed to double check the specifications of the spell before attempting it.

She ran to the attic and pulled the stairs down, finding her very first trunk in the corner, she opened her blood wards and rummaged through for the tome. As much as she hated the idea of tearing a page out, she needed to keep it with her to reference. With a wince, the deed was done, and she was resetting her wards and running back outside.

Lying, book desecration, theft… add it to the list of things she was going to do to get him back under her half-hatched plan. She apparated back to Grimmauld place and made her way up to Harry’s room. She would return his cloak later, right now she needed something reliable to sneak around with. She had never rolled her eyes so hard when she found the invisibility cloak;

‘Really Harry, under the bed? Could you be more unoriginal?’

She grabbed the cloak, wrapped it around herself and headed to use the floo. Arriving in the Ministry atrium, she had never been happier wizards embraced Christmas leave, no one was there to witness the flash of flames bringing her through. She cast a silencing charm to cover the clacking of her shoes on the marble floor and started to make her way down to the dungeons.

Slipping through the halls, she was tempted to sneak back to the Auror department and see what progress they had made, perhaps it was her acknowledgement of her own arrogance that kept her on her path; she was the brightest witch of age, she wasn’t silly enough to require validation of her cleverness.

Finding Narcissa Malfoy would have been like finding a needle in a haystack had she not turned herself in. That was something to be thankful for. There were three levels of ministry cells ranging in security. She would naturally be on the lowest level with the highest security.

Getting through was going to be the challenge; she wasn’t a ministry official and she had no idea
what kind of spells had been used; but that was another reason for checking the book. She knew there was a rather helpful skeleton key spell that would hopefully get her in, she had just needed the incantation.

The cells weren’t connected to the elevator system, another means of security she supposed but a rather inconvenient one. Going down flight after flight of stairs spiralling into the bowels of the Ministry she was rather puffed; she used the time checking the cells to regain her breath and after looking through more peepholes than she could keep count of, finally found the one she had been looking for.

She knew the cell was silenced so there was no point trying to knock or call out. She began reciting the incantation to unlock the door and after a few tries, the handle finally gave way.

Narcissa stood when she opened the door and looked right past her. She had forgotten she still had the cloak on. Pulling it from her head she saw Narcissa start to scream and then recognition cross her face. ‘At least my hair is good for something’ she thought sarcastically.

Folding the cloak over her arm she greeted Narcissa and waited for the witch to question her. It was a tense few moments and she figured when Narcissa spoke she ought to be polite;

“What are you doing here miss Granger?”

“I’m sorry for the intrusion Mrs. Malfoy but there’s an emergency and you’re the only one that can help me.”

“Well, there’s only one reason anyone would want or need my help, what have you done with my son?”

“What have I done? Oh Merlin, don’t lose your temper… Mrs. Malfoy your son was abducted in muggle London this afternoon by Alecto Carrow, who I suspect is acting on the orders of your husband.”

“Well, what does that have to do with you? I ask again, why are you here Miss Granger?”

“He hasn’t told you? oh for fu- urgh Draco I’m going to kill you…”

This wasn’t going to plan at all, of course Draco had avoided telling his mother, she knew he had and it simply slipped her mind. She had hoped this conversation would be over a bracing cup of tea rather than in a dank ministry cell while Draco was god knows where.

“Mrs. Malfoy, here’s the short version: your son and I are dating, courting; whatever! I love him and I’m here for your help, he probably should have told you sooner, it was on the cards… anyway, that’s beside the point; Yes, I’m a mudblood, I know you might hate me; but I’m going to get him back and as his mother I expect you to help me.”

“Miss Grang-“

“Can we just not do the whole miss thing; you know my name and I don’t have the time to continue with niceties.”

“Very well, so long as you do the same mi-; you should know before we start that I actually don’t disapprove, of the two of you, or your blood status. I’d very much like to have a conversation about it when all this is over if you’d accept.”

You could have knocked her over with a feather. That did not go how she was expecting at all. not
to mention how Narcissa’s demeanour had changed, suddenly warm and open. Gods she hadn’t seen someone give her ‘The Mum Look’ in so long, it almost brought her to tears.

“Of course Narcissa, I’d love to.”

“So, what do you know that the Aurors don’t, let’s not tarry; out with it.”

“Well, I found this spell, back when we were hunting Vold- you know what that’s not important; I have a blood-based locator spell that is some pretty hefty dark magic, but will find him faster than anything the Aurors know of. Naturally, I need you to complete the spell, it won’t work to find Lucius he isn’t exactly your blood, but I'm betting if we can find Draco, we can find him too.”

“Alright, what do you need me to do.”

oOo

Hermione knew that the wards in the cells wouldn’t allow them to apparate out, so it was a long climb back to the elevators for both of them. Still under the cloak, they managed to take the floo back to the agreed Order safehouse undetected. Once there Hermione began setting up to start the spell, grabbing essentials from the well-stocked pantry as she tried not to lose herself in her grief being in Tonks and Remus’ home. It was a good distraction.

Half potion, half incantation; it was one hell of a complicated spell. In a way she was glad to have Narcissa’s help, Draco had often mentioned what a formidable and cunning witch she was; a competent set of hands wouldn’t go amiss.

She had Narcissa prepping ingredients for the potion component, as she made the base. Stirring as directed, she added ingredients until the brew turned a deep shade of blue. After adding the last few ingredients and repeating the incantation ‘sanguis sanguinem meum’ (the blood of my blood) over and over until the colour changed to a silvery white, she could have jumped for joy when thin veins of deep red spread through, changing the colour and alerting her the potion was done.

All in all, the potion had taken about an hour, but it had been taxing. With the potion done and spelled correctly, all that was left to do was get a bit of blood. Unfortunately, being completely archaic magic, it was far too specific and all too ridiculous. It had to come directly from the heart. Which with her knowledge of modern anatomical science, was completely irrelevant seeing as all blood is pumped through the body from the heart. It made no sense, but perhaps Narcissa might understand it.

“Dear, you're missing the point. It might be dark magic but it's about family, the blood from the heart isn’t a literal term, it's figurative. Your translation here is too rigid; The spell literally requires a ‘bleeding heart’, for a locator spell that’s perfectly practical; a person wouldn’t go through all this unless they were desperate.”

“So, the bleeding heart, of a blood relative to locate that which is lost?”

“Exactly. Now then, seeing as my heart is plenty bloodied at the moment, you let me know when you're ready and we can slice away.”

Hermione paled and had to stop a chuckle at Narcissa’s blunt humour; ‘so that’s where Draco got it.’ Refocusing herself, she figured it would be easier to draw the blood required and use as needed, seeing as they would have to complete this step multiple times; Once on a world map and then repeat until they had narrowed it down.

She grabbed a large beaker from the equipment store and placed it down in front of Narcissa. With
the spells copious requirement, she showed Narcissa, asking permission and marked out a pint.

She was one tough Witch, she had to give Narcissa Malfoy that. She didn’t flinch as she dragged the tip of her wand across her wrist, nor did she pale at the sight of her blood loss. Hermione would have much preferred getting her hands on an IV rather than go for the slice method, but in a pinch, needs must, even if it did make her feel squeamish. ‘I fucking hate dark magic’

She watched the beaker fill with a grimace, Narcissa had to deepen the wound once or twice and Hermione had no doubts about how far this woman would go for her son. The moment the pint marker was reached, she healed Narcissa with an excellent charm she had learnt from the late Moody.

She grabbed her beaded bag from the counter and summoned the atlas and maps she would need. After laying the world map out on the benchtop, Narcissa looked over her shoulder as she coated the map with blood and applied the potion.

“Allright now that’s done; Narcissa, I need you to repeat the following phrase and wave your wand in an infinity motion over the map. The magic is specific, loosely translated the incantation is ‘search for my blood to reveal my son,’ naturally I can’t command your blood, so I need you to repeat after me; Mi fili mi quaeram sanguinem revelare.”

Narcissa did as she was bid and watched as the blood on the map turned an inky black, it began to coagulate over France and both shared a look of surprise. Hermione grabbed the next map and repeated the gruesome process. Southern France, Provence region, and finally an address… well not exactly an address, Draco was in Chateaux des Baux. Apparently, castles charmed to look like ruins was a pastime for wizards.

Grabbing the maps and cleaning the surfaces, she took a blood replenishing potion out of the cabinet and handed it to Narcissa.

“Allright, we need to get you back to the ministry, from there I’ll tell Harry the plan to keep the Aurors busy and then steal a portkey to France.”

“If you think I’m going back in that cell, you belong in St. Mungos, I’m coming with you.”

Well there was no arguing with a mama bear, Narcissa wanted to tag along she wasn’t about to stop her. There was a brief moment where she wondered how many times she had apparated of flooed today but getting back into the ministry she didn’t really have the time to laugh about it. She pulled harry out into the corridor and after finding out the Aurors had jack shit, she told him to stall until she sent her patronus. Thankfully he didn’t question her and with a hug and a nod of understanding, she bolted for the portkey office where she had arranged to meet Narcissa.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

so, next chapter will be up within the next 24 hours. its times like these I'm glad I jump perspectives because there's going to be some awesome dialogue I can't wait to share with you all :)

as ever, feel free to leave me some feedback or drop a kudos, now that I'm hitting the
first main plotline (yes I said first, there will be more) I’m really excited to hear what you
guys and gals think :) 

more soon
xo Em
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

Draco's POV
a small warning for violence, allusions to past abuse.
otherwise, I've tried to keep it toned down but its still a bit heavy.

Chapter Notes

welcome to the Frankenchapter- sorry it took me so long to post but I literally rewrote this about eight times before I was happy with it (and I'm not sure if I'm 100 percent on that)... then to procrastinate, I fell down the hole that is 'strictly dramoine's' fb fic recs (no regrets though)

its a mishmash of those rewrites and it might seem a little anticlimactic and leading to something final, but I promise that this plotline is not over.

I always planned for this fic to go past eighth year and into the future- it's going to be a long one and this isn't going to work itself out over two or three chapters, it's going to crop up as we continue.

also, HOLY S*** this has over 200 kudos and I cannot thank you all enough, it literally gives me all the warm and fuzzies - sending virtual hugs to all of you that commented or left Kudos (or both)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

He hated forcing Hermione into leaving him, but it was better than seeing her end up under his father’s wand. He jolted when something cold pressed against the bare skin at the back of his neck. A portkey then, so it was going to be a destination kidnapping.

Wherever the hell he was, it was uncomfortably cold. Looking around he was met with old stones and décor he didn’t recognise. When Amycus Carrow stepped out of the shadows, he had to suppress a shiver. Alecto moved out from behind and he felt himself tense as he saw her remove an apparatus over her face, housing what couldn’t possibly be Alastor Moody’s eye, but looked damn similar.

Having been taught and taunted by Crouch Jr. wearing the eye, he knew it was supposed to be an electrifying blue; this one was a terrifying shade of red. He had been one of many to wonder if Moody’s eye had been an artifact or something he had made himself; if Draco hadn’t been so preoccupied, he would have been deeply satisfied knowing the answer to that little wizarding mystery.
He took a seat and began to clear his mind, preparing for the onslaught of pain to come. Alecto cast a body bind on him and he had almost forgotten how much he hated the sensation, trying not to let his fear control him, he tried to relax. ‘once more unto the breach’ he thought bitterly as he surveyed his surroundings with a clearer head. He hated this forced regression; he wanted so badly to be the person he was with Hermione: But here, waiting for an audience with his father, it was frighteningly easy to find the persona he had hidden away, the one he used to hide his fears.

Alecto seemed to want to taunt him first. She waved the red eye in front of his face as though she were trying to hypnotise him. Only his eyes tracked the eye’s pendulum motion and he did so want to scoff at her.

“Such a waste, you shacking up with that mudblood… but we might still have time for a little fun first. No? Such a shame really.”

He desperately wanted to tell Alecto where she could shove her insult but doing that would give him no advantage even if he could manage it; dealing with death eaters, even the crazy ones was politics; crude, but politics nonetheless. Behind her words was a threat, a proposition and one hell of a fucked-up flirtation. He wished he could have pulled away in utter revulsion when she straddled him and pressed a kiss to his cheek. ‘Ugh, why do they all have to be so rapey?’

Alecto’s actions appeared to enrage Amycus. Now there was something he could use; it had gone ‘round the ranks once or twice that the brother and sister may be more than that, it seemed to be a sore spot. He didn’t see his father come in, but he was throwing insults as soon as he felt the body bind release.

“Aw, Alec, looks like your brother’s a bit jealous. Afraid there’s a little competition Amy? I wouldn’t touch her with a te-”

“ENOUGH! Draco!”

Well, it seemed his father didn’t want him to stew that much. Lucius Malfoy stormed in and the siblings fell silent, backing out of the room and into the shadows.

His father had always been an imposing man, despite not being someone you would be afraid of in a dark alley. He was the kind that hid madness behind his intelligence. Draco could see him calculating as he looked him over but there was something different about his glare, something unsettling he couldn’t place; it reminded him of someone else.

“Well Draco, it seems your little mudblood got away this time. Don’t fret, I’m sure we’ll catch her soon and there’ll be time for tea before I torture her.”

His father let out a short, maniacal cackle at his own horrid joke and he could sense something was incredibly wrong. He heard his father muttering under his breath; a conversation with no one that he couldn’t quite make out; it scared him. Last time his father had come back from Azkaban rather hollow, timid even; this was something completely different.

“So, Father, why have you brought me here? What purpose am I to serve once I am reconditioned; as you so eloquently put it while I was growing up?”

“You will serve.”

Serve? Serve who? Despite his confusion, Draco saw an opportunity to taunt his father. Curling his lip into a wicked sneer, he wanted to see how long it would take his father to snap. It was a test to see how far gone he was.
“Oh, so it’s not you running the show? still a behind the scenes operator then? always better men ahead of you? I’m not surprised.”

“YOU WILL NOT SPEAK TO ME IN SUCH A WAY IF YOU VALUE YOUR LIFE!”

“No need to lose your head, it’s just the truth. So, who is the new supreme idiot? Anyone I know?”

Apparently, the fuse was nonexistent after this stint in Azkaban: His father’s fist hitting his face hurt more than he remembered, or perhaps he had held something back in the past. Draco’s tongue darted out to the cut on his lip and the iron taste of blood filled his mouth. ‘Good, that got him mad enough not to use the wand.’

“How dare you disrespect me, boy.”

Draco briefly wondered if his father would kill him to spare the humiliation of his refusal to break; it might be preferable, at least he’d die knowing he did the right thing. But there was still something ‘off’ that made him more fearful than he usually was.

When his father screamed at him to kneel, he did as he was asked, it was so unlike his father to break his indifference he was too shocked to remember to resist. Besides with no wand, he didn’t want to fall when the first curse hit; he could only suppress so much of the cruciatus without one. Being on his knees wasn’t a bad idea.

He knew this technique all too well; make the person feel small, humiliate them, make them scream, then build them back up with honeyed promises and ideals. There was nothing his father could do to him; with his heart safe in Hermione’s hands, his resolve would not be broken this time.

His initial resistance to being asked nicely to recant bought him a few beatings with the appearance of Yaxley and Dolohov. Why there had been no reports on death eater activity was baffling, to say the least, there was a hive of them and the authorities were completely unaware; though he supposed the Malfoy vaults were more than capable of keeping any Ministry and the papers quiet.

When there was no more sport to be had and Draco was sufficiently broken, his father pulled his wand and dismissed his two lackeys. This was the true reconditioning, made worse knowing there was no rhyme or reason for it, his father just enjoyed it, a means and end to reinforce his doctrine. Make him hurt until he complied, until he went back to that scared child soldier he used to be.

The first crucio hit and he almost passed out. His tolerance for the curse was extremely lowered, he hadn’t realised how long it had been since the last one, but he quickly regained the ability to combat some of the effects. With each round, he was told what it was for, but strangely enough, it didn’t evoke guilt, it made him proud, he drew on that; He was glad for every supposed insult his father could throw at him.

“This is for dirtying your line with that filthy mudblood!”

“For renouncing your beliefs!”

His father turned his head and spoke someone else’s words;

“She is disappointed in you Draco…”

“For being tolerant!”

“For being weak!”
The last one caused a different reaction, one Draco hadn’t known to expect from himself. Before his father could spit his next venomous sentence, he pulled himself off the floor with no small amount of effort and stood before his father; almost unable to support himself through the pain, he stood firm as he could against his Father.

Never raising his voice, he started to talk back.

“I am not weak; what you see as failure is strength.”

“CRUCIO!”

For the first time in his life, Draco did not fall at his father’s curse. It hurt like hell, he screamed and he bloody well wanted to die; but he stood his ground. It winded him, but each curse seemed to have less effect as he kept his mind on what was most important.

“You dragged our name through the mud, Hermione is no stain on our line, she is better than all of us.”

“CRUCIO!”

Draco’s legs started to shake, and he couldn’t spare the strength to wipe away the involuntary tears running down his cheeks as his nerves sizzled; he wondered why he decided to stand in the first fucking place. Why didn’t he just lay down and take his punishment?

No, not punishment, this wasn’t punishment; this was a reaffirmation of who he had become, how far he was willing to go to stay true to himself. Steeling his mind, he straightened as much as he could and spoke his next retort with a clear, strong voice that rang through the chamber.

“They were your beliefs, not mine and they’ve always been wrong. I’m no disappointment, you are.”

“CRUCIO!”

“Tolerance is a virtue, not a weakness.”

He waited for the next curse, but it never came. Coming to his senses a little bit he realised the room was rather empty. ‘Huh, it’s all the really crazy ones here, that makes sense.’ The Carrows, Dolohov, Yaxley and Rowle seemed to be the only ones here; aside from his Father. He hadn’t realised his torture was a show, one that the star had begun to ruin.

Thorfinn Rowle was angered by his deprivation and Draco had to stop himself laughing at the patronizing tone the man used with his supposed leader. Draco watched the exchange with a small amount of amusement and waited for his father to return his attention to its original source of ire. Catching his breath, he relished in the reprieve it granted.

“You will refrain from interrupting me Rowle, or you will be next in line…”

His father cocked his head in the oddest gesture, as though someone was beside him and whispering in his ear Draco watched as he toyed with a small black stone hung around his neck… It wasn’t something he could ever remember Lucius owning. His father’s next words were clear and strange.

“Yes, I will ensure he is brought back into the fold, my Lady.”
Perhaps he had misheard, there was no one else here to call Lady? It certainly wasn’t directed at Alecto. Fuck, his father must be madder than the Hatter in that Wonderland book Hermione had given him to read. He decided to prod for answers.

“So, what exactly is your plan here? I mean you haven’t quite managed to fulfil the terms of your letter, but I assume you need the three of us for something?”

The explanation his father gave was equal parts unexpected and horrifying. Oddly enough, it was completely believable (thank god Hermione had explained what a god damn horcrux was and what it could do, or he’d have been lost). There was no humanity left in his father, it was eerie how much it reminded him of his Aunt. Lucius Malfoy being a conduit for something otherworldly residing in his body was a perfectly valid explanation, when under the scrutiny of his son; someone who knew him best.

Of all the things Voldemort did in his life, teaching Bellatrix Lestrange to make a horcrux might be the worst; Draco felt sorry for Lucius. He needed help, that much was clear; the other death eaters fed off this madness, believed he was chosen to bring forth the word of the true power behind Voldemort; he had to wonder how they managed to get this far when they were all as batty as each other. Whatever part of Aunt Bella’s soul was in that fucking horcrux was clearly lucid enough to deal with it.

Lucius’… Well technically ‘Bellatrix’s plan’ would be more fitting seeing as his father clearly wasn’t acting under his own volition; either way, it wasn’t something he was wholly privy to (they summarised and while the plan was dark and far-reaching he didn’t quite get how it was meant to work): but he did know that if they ever managed to replenish their ranks enough to carry it out, there would be no saving muggleborns, no saving anyone.

His expected part in it was abhorrent; a perfect example of pureblood values, he was to recruit, lead as a general, marry some pureblood and have a few soldiers for the cause. That was never ever, ever, ever going to happen. As for his mother well, he didn’t want to think about her fate; whatever his father had once been, he was no more, that much was clear. There would certainly be no mercy from her sister, now possessing her husband.

Honestly, his Aunt’s combination of intelligence and cruelty could rule the world. He wondered if his father was still even in there; with Bella in his head, he was likely two steps away from being a drooling mess on the carpet. Despite everything his father had done, he couldn’t find it in himself to feel anything other than pity. Sure, he had his faults; huge ones, but whatever had happened to Lucius Malfoy had seen all that he had once been, replaced by a different person entirely. No one truly deserved that fate.

As for the other death eaters, he had no pity for them; they were vile snakes, grouping together for warmth and safety. Where his father was unwell; they were complicit and lucid. They were biding their time until they could make a play for power.

The whole dual conversation, possession thing was hurting his brain. But he wasn’t about to start calling his father his aunt, that was just too weird. Maybe it would piss her spirit (soul fragment?) off more not to? ‘Ok ‘father’ it is then, seeing as it is his mouth she’s using to spout her bullshit’ he thought bitterly, as he tried to tune out the filth his father was saying on behalf of his dead horcrux of an aunt. He almost laughed at the intent behind his phrasing, he wasn’t brave enough to call her that to her… well, she doesn’t exactly have a face.

“You will be part of a new generation of purebloods who will herald the beginning of the next
golden age of wizardry. If you return to your family and the ranks willingly you will see history made as we tear down governments; wizarding and muggle alike, it will be anarchy and we will rise from the debris victorious. Draco can you see the vision I have for the world? It was our Lord’s greatest wish that we all take our place at the top, if you prove yourself there might still be a place at our table.”

Draco had to resist the urge to slap a hand to his forehead and shake his head in exasperation. At least the monologuing meant he could start to figure out if there was a way out of all this. He still had no idea where he was, he stood and headed for the large window as though he might figure it out if he could just see outside.

The landscape was mostly flat with a few hills, lots of farmland, cypress trees and an ochre-coloured soil that reminded him of… ‘Oh!! Provence! Of course. We must be in one of Bella’s inherited estates’

Well at least if he did escape he knew his way around. The Riviera was the ultimate pureblood’s playground and he had been mucking around in it since he was three, he spoke French and relatively good Italian, it wouldn’t be so hard to reach the French Ministry. He knew he wouldn’t be able to apparate out, but even semi-possessed people have to sleep sometime; he could take the torture, but servitude wasn’t what he saw in his future, he wanted out.

Exhausted, sore and half broken he was left alone in the same room he was tortured in. Bellatrix and his father promised to return and repeat the process every day until he saw reason, informing him that there would be more of his housemates joining him soon. It wasn’t just that they wanted the pureblood Slytherin boys to rejoin, they wanted revenge for leaving in the first place, they wanted their pound of flesh; he would bear the brunt of it because he actually had the mark on his arm.

‘Wonder what would happen if I just sliced it off, cut the skin right down to the bone and peeled?’ it was almost a legitimate idea if it meant being free of shite like this.

It took a while for him to get bored but in his weakened state, all he wanted was Hermione. Letting his thoughts drift to her, the image of her face just before she left him in the alley was burned into his eyelids.

If he made it out alive and she ever forgave him…

He drifted off on the sofa, thinking of ways he could make it up to her, knowing that tomorrow would bring more pain.

Chapter End Notes

as always feel free to leave feedback, I love reading and answering- they challenge me to keep myself on track and write faster, knowing that there are people investing in what's coming next.

for those of you that are interested, this will show you the chateaux and the surrounding area - Chateau des Baux Provence
and this is what I'd like to think it looks like to magical folk- I snapped a pic of this near Bandol, France and thought it was perfect. La-Seyne-sur-Mer
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

no warnings for this one

Hermione's POV

Chapter Notes

sorry for the gaps between posts lately, it's been a kind of horrid two weeks; with the anniversary of my friend's death hitting over the long weekend, seasonal depression well and truly rearing its head and a few more panic attacks than usual, my work life has suffered and my muse had to be put on the back burner.

It's taken a bit longer to get this edited, so I've extended the chapter a little to make up for it. They aren't out of the woods yet, but I needed to be back in Draco's headspace to finish the conversation at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Finding a ready-made portkey to the south of France had been rather easy, the office was immaculately organised and Hermione counted it as a good omen. It surprised her how easily she slipped into battle mode; focused, analytical… she hated that part of her even existed and yet she was relying on the mindset. Things had been so incredibly perfect, and it wasn’t like they were unaware of the risk, they just didn’t think anyone would be bold enough to kidnap them in broad daylight, in muggle London, let alone be able to see through the numerous kids of disillusionment charms they had used. It twisted her stomach into knots thinking about how she had gone from the happiest she had ever been, to feeling insurmountable dread; it had happened so fast it made her dizzy.

Her heart truly went out to Narcissa, she had to be feeling much worse and yet there wasn’t a single sign she was struggling. Her son currently in the clutches of her husband and the rest of his dastardly crew; Sure, it sounded like something out of a comic book, but it was no laughing matter; the hero, she had learned doesn’t always win; if logic was anything to go by the hero should never really win.

That was her terrible secret. Hermione Granger; Golden Girl, struggled to keep her own hope aflame. A good actress knows how to pretend they think they’ll make it through but won’t be deluded into thinking everyone will survive. It was the only time she hated being smart, she couldn’t even lie to herself.

So, here she was just waiting to lose another person she cared for and for the first time it was so much more detrimental, Draco was someone she simply couldn’t lose. Maybe it was a twisted way to find some semblance of hope, but knowing he would do the same, no matter the odds moved her forward with that same detached determination most warriors haven’t the courage to admit to possessing.
From under the cloak, she and Narcissa reached out and touched the chipped teacup that was their ticket to Arles. While it wasn’t exactly where they needed to go, it was the closest they could get. She had been lucky the map they had used showed tourist destinations, otherwise, they would have had to research the location and hope for the best when they got there.

Touching down in some unknown alley, the two witches immediately apparated closer to their destination. She hated having to apparate somewhere unfamiliar, it could lead to both witches ending up splinched (thus the portkey to at least put them on the right continent). But it was a necessary evil. They appeared with a soft pop, not far from the main road leading up to the 'ruins that weren’t actually ruins'.

They walked until they could feel the effects of the wards and stopped their advance to begin planning an offensive. Now able to see through the glamour charm hiding the impressive structure, Narcissa took charge of directing Hermione through typical room set up for a place like this.

According to her, Draco would likely be kept in the eastern wing, high up as possible and furthest from the doors (more chance of being caught if he tried to escape). Hermione had to thank her lucky stars she had the Malfoy Matriarch with her or she really wouldn’t have stopped to think about manoeuvring around what was practically a small castle.

“Now Hermione, when we find him we have to be careful, if they have any idea how much he’s changed, they’ll expect him to try to escape. If they catch us we’re all dead and it won’t be quick if my husband’s last letter is anything to go by.”

“Narcissa if I may, what did he say to have you so worried?”

“It wasn’t so much what was said, I’ve been dealing with my husband’s threats for years. My sisters and I had a code we would use to send letters when both of them were at Hogwarts. The letter my husband sent used Bellatrix’s code. I was more inclined to take that seriously.”

“I see. But how could Lucius have known the code? Bellatrix is dead.”

“Or is she, dear? It stands to reason Voldemort might have taught her how to make a Horcrux.”

Hermione was a little dumbstruck hearing Narcissa talk about Horcruxes as though they were common knowledge. She had very suddenly learned that all Malfoys were full of surprises. Narcissa was someone that under different circumstances she would love to sit down and have a proper chat with. To find yet another kindred spirit in what had seemed such a lonesome world left her feeling almost giddy with excitement, but now was not the time and that wasn’t enough to overshadow the way her stomach lurched at the prospect of her nightmares becoming reality.

“I didn’t wish to speak so plainly considering what she did to you, but I believe she may have found a way to control Lucius through her Horcrux, it’s just a theory but it’s the only explanation I have.”

“It’s not theory, its fact. Not many people know that Horcruxes can influence people who come into contact with them, I’ve seen and felt the effects first hand. How Lucius came by it in Azkaban is a mystery, but we will have to play this very carefully if we’re dealing with her.”

Hermione began explaining Horcrux destruction and Narcissa was clearly astounded at how Hermione, Ron and Harry had managed to find all of them in time for the final battle. Unfortunately, this time around there wasn’t going to be a chance to destroy it, the objective was to get everyone out alive.
Narcissa nodded and after confirming a systematic search and attack plan, they used the skeleton key spell to slip through the wards once the sun dipped below the horizon.

\textit{oOo}

Moving through the cold halls lit with torches, she wished the Marauder’s map worked in all buildings (that might be something to look into). Every now and then they would hear the clacking of shoe soles on flagstone and they would have to press against the wall to avoid detection, moving further into the fortress, Hermione was trying very hard not to jinx things by saying things were so far, so good.

When they reached the top floor empty handed, she started to worry; ‘\textit{What if they moved him? what if they’ve killed him already? does this place have dungeons? I forgot to ask!}’ her thoughts were going a million miles an hour as she and Narcissa climbed stairs at an agonizingly slow pace to ensure they stayed in sync under the cloak.

During their ascent they came across Corban Yaxley; both witches had stunned him so effectively, he wouldn’t be telling anyone of their presence for quite some time. Not that either of them felt sorry for the man.

Reaching the top landing, they were met with two doors, with a quick \textit{alohomora}, the locked door unlatched and cracked open slightly. Hermione pushed it open and the two slipped through covered by the room’s natural shadows.

She caught sight of his shock of platinum hair in the corner and she was out from under the cloak before she could even think. She didn’t care if she startled him, or if his mother was watching this display of relief and affection. She just pulled him up out of his slumber and into her arms without a second thought.

He went to say her name, but she was kissing him before he had even managed the first syllable. Her fingers tangled in the soft hair at the nape of his neck, remaining there after she pulled away. She instantly regretted her actions;

\textit{‘Oh merlin his face’}. She looked him over and automatically catalogued his injuries, running her thumb gently over his undamaged cheek. Split lip, black eyes, swollen cheekbone, bruises around his throat (oh god they’re fingers…), a cut over his brow… Godric, what on earth happened. She moved her hands from the back of his head and checked his ribs, he winced once or twice, and she would bet his fourth, fifth and maybe sixth ribs were all cracked. All she wanted to do was lift his shirt and check the bruising and get to healing, but she knew better than to worry his mother by doing so. Still holding her hands against his sides, she watched as small circles of blood seeped into the fabric sticking the cloth to his skin, she didn’t need to ask what they were, she had cruciatus scars riddling her skin too.

She knew that her emotions were running rampant across her face but she didn’t want to make him feel uncomfortable about how much it worried her. She knew she was bumbling her attempt at an apology, but she just didn’t have the words.

\textit{“Um, god I'm so sorry; Merlin, I'm just so glad you're alive; you might want to say hello to your mother though.”}

He looked at her with a mix of confusion and hope that had to be one of the most adorable combinations of expressions he was capable of. His mother slipped off the invisibility cloak and handed it to Hermione before crushing her only son to her chest with such gentle ferocity Hermione hadn’t thought possible at the same time. Narcissa was whispering something she couldn’t quite
make out, but Hermione was far too occupied with transfiguring bedsheets into ropes and rudimentary harnesses to think about it; it was more important to let them have their moment even if it did make her miss her parents more keenly than she already did.

Having seen the window upon entry, she had already decided the fastest way to get out of this godforsaken place would be to repel down the front and apparate once outside the anti-apparition jinx’s boundary. After sharing her plan and a few mental calculations, she estimated how much they would need and set to work securing everything. Narcissa was warding the door and Draco was wandlessly creating notches in the exterior stones to serve as footholds. She had to stop herself from gawking at the forethought, ‘Why didn’t I think of that?’

It took her a moment to wonder why he wasn’t using his wand, she realised in the heat of the moment (and perhaps some lingering effects of his torture) he must have forgotten to summon it. She muttered a quick accio, hoping that there wasn’t an anti-theft charm on it and once the wand appeared, she handed it to Draco who looked at her like she was Ollivander and he was eleven again.

“Salazar help me, what would I do without you?”

“Yes, I know I'm brilliant, can we deal with that later; the longer we’re here the more chance we get caught and killed and I really don’t want to face whatever’s left of your aunt without a basilisk fang.”

“You know about her Horcrux?”

“Your mother figured it out, she’ll explain later.”

“Granger, you know we can’t leave without destroying it?”

“Well, that's exactly what we are doing. Draco, we need to live to fight another day.”

He quieted then, she could see how much he wanted to argue but apparently, she had made her point well enough. He looked exhausted and far from fighting condition. Whatever they had done to him had taken its toll.

As usual, things never went simply. Apparently, someone had been checking on Draco and he had been too out of it to know. So, when the sound of a fist crashing against wood resounded through the room, all three startled. Who would have thought death eaters were still polite enough to knock?

Draco quickly helped his mother through the window and watched for a moment as she began climbing down, her rope pulled taught across the room to where it was tied to the heavy bedframe. Antonin Dolohov stepped through the door and it took everything she had not to exact her revenge for the scar he had given her. He sauntered into the room and hauled Draco up, dragging him away from her escape plan to god knows where. She followed a few moments after and found herself led into a large dining hall.

Death eaters were sat around the table and while she had never witnessed them gathering in such a way, the look on Draco’s face told her he was struggling to keep himself in check as he relived his own nightmares.

Looking over the group, she saw more familiar faces than she had wanted to. Her gaze drifted over
where Draco had been forced to sit and she had to choke down bile at the reminder that had things
gone differently, he would be here willingly, and she would be dead. She watched as Lucius called
the meeting to order and when she glimpsed his eyes, she found herself staring into the same abyss
she had when Bellatrix had hovered over her and carved into her flesh. Moving carefully, she stood
behind Draco and drew her wand ready for the first sign of danger.

The meeting didn’t seem to deal with much else other than making preparations to kidnap other
young purebloods. Hermione was stunned to hear the Weasleys were among those wanted; seemed
they weren’t so choosy about blood traitors when pickings were slim. She and Harry well and truly
had targets on their backs as the group grumbled about their shared hatred for the-boy-who-lived and
the Mudblood-who-helped-him.

Lucius was startlingly quiet, observing the others as they schemed punishments for resistance and
defiance. Reconditioning, brainwashing, psychological torture; ‘Why don’t they just pull out some
LSD and go for it’ she thought with a touch of fear at the reality of the situation. She admired
Draco’s ability to sit still and listen to what they had planned for him and many of his friends;
including him in the discussion was a torture in itself, they knew he would be sitting there,
wondering when he would experience the atrocities they were brainstorming; wondering when he
would lose his resolve or his mind.

From her place behind the table, she listened to them discuss their vision of a new world order; new
and improved compared to Voldemort’s intended dictatorship. If there was one twisted positive it
was that the older generation recognised that they could hold no place or power in said order
(perhaps that was a weakness that could be exploited if they ever made it out and managed to tell
somebody). The death eaters intended to rule as puppet masters, behind the curtains. Perhaps that
was worse? Once they controlled the youth there would be no stopping them from using future
generations the same way. Voldemort had never bothered to think about his regime as a cycle…
Bellatrix clearly had.

How was this going unchecked? The Aurors only knew there was organised activity because she
had told them (not that they had been effective in finding any leads after the letter arrived). But what
about those like Blaise and Theo who would be alone for most of the holidays? The Slytherins were
all so tightknit that if one went missing, it was one less person to notice or care that others had
followed suit.

Standing behind him she longed to reach out and offer comfort, but if he knew she hadn’t left with
his mother, he would be far more likely to do something stupid. She hoped Narcissa was bringing the
cavalry if she made it out.

The meeting went on and every time Lucius had to call the meeting to order she could practically
hear Bellatrix’s screech behind his words. Knowing what she did about the way Tom Riddle had
used Horcruxes, Hermione wondered if perhaps the fragment of Bellatrix’s soul enthralling Lucius
was saner than the real deal. While mind and mouthpiece had remained mostly silent to let the others
squabble and argue about who was kidnapping who, when they decided to speak the room fell silent.

They were practically granting amnesty if the purebloods chose to rejoin willingly; But their futures
were so meticulously planned it made her sick. Draco and his friends would be installed in the
ministry, forced to marry a pureblood witch and any children were to be taken and raised by trusted
dead eaters: growing into soldiers who didn’t come to realise that prejudice was a mistake, who
could then be installed as the new leaders in contact with Bellatrix when the time came. Draco just
sat and listened without batting an eye and all of a sudden, his calm demeanour made sense; this
wasn’t the first time he had listened to someone plan his life with no consideration of his own
opinions or objections.
She would not allow this to stand, she was getting him away from all this nonsense. The death eaters stood and toasted to the beginning of their success and retired for the evening, one had walked around the table and had almost bumped into her but with a quick duck between chairs, she managed to remain undiscovered. Draco remained in his seat and she saw him glaring at his father’s back as he retreated.

Once she was sure they were alone she murmured a silencing charm and placed a hand on his shoulder. He jumped and grabbed her wrist so tight she thought he might break it. recognition graced his features and he held her hand as he walked them back to his room.

“You didn’t leave!”

He hissed at her and she could see the conflict of her choice behind his eyes; he didn’t want to be alone, but he wanted her out of harm’s way. Well, she wasn’t going anywhere and told him as much.

“You don’t understand! Alecto has this eye, it’s like Moody’s but its red; it’s how they saw through our charms, I don’t know if it works on the cloak. You can’t stay!”

“Moody’s could, but it won’t matter, you’re coming with me, now that I know what they want you for, I'm not risking leaving you here.”

“I can’t leave until she’s dead! You of all people should understand why.”

“For Merlin’s Bloody sake, I only told you what they were. Other than fiendfyre, which worked out so well last time, do you know how to destroy one?”

He looked down at his shoes, a crestfallen expression marring his features and she knew instantly she was out of line bringing up Crabbe’s death. bringing her emotions back under control she explained what they would need to destroy Bellatrix’s Horcrux and promised to tell him the full account of her time on the run. He seemed to accept there wasn’t anything he could do and moved toward the window.

Before he could climb over his head snapped toward the door and in a split second, she was throwing the cloak back over her head before Lucius Malfoy stepped through.

Her rage was almost untamable, and she was so inspired to be violent she couldn’t pick which method of dispatch she wanted to use as she tried to keep her breaths shallow and quiet.

Draco, on the other hand, seemed much more collected and eyed his father with a look she knew all too well, once directed at her she now understood it wasn’t unbridled hate but a mask to hide the other emotions residing just under the surface; The reason he was so set on destroying Bellatrix was simply because he hoped to save his father and wasn’t that what she had hoped for him? she had loved and lost both her parents, if he wanted to save his father she would offer her help.

For all she knew maybe Lucius Malfoy had begun to repent and then been corrupted by a Horcrux? Who was she to assume that he couldn’t change, Narcissa had been lovely, hadn’t she? As much as she wanted to hate the man, she could understand Draco’s conflict. Family is family and Draco wasn’t one to forget that fact.

oOo

Lucius had taken a seat and waited for his son to join him at the small table in the corner. Draco was rightfully wary but sat down while Hermione quietly worked through her thoughts.

Lucius wasted no time in imploring his son to try to escape. It wasn’t how she had expected this
conversation to go. Things were so confusing and complicated she could hardly keep up. Frankly, she rather wanted to take notes just to stop her head from spinning.

“You need to escape, get your mother out of the Ministry and back to the manor. You are by rights the head of the house and you can change the wards to keep me out. Once that is done, I can’t touch either of you there, it’s safer than the Ministry and I’m sure the mudblood will offer her help. Bellatrix is a controlling force but there are places I do not wear her and I am asking you to figure out a way out of here before she decides you’re better off chained up in the dungeons where I can’t help you.”

“But I could get you out too if you’d let me. You don’t have Aunt Bella with you now and if you truly want to leave, what is there to stop you?”

“If I leave someone else will take up the mantle, would you rather Dolohov controlled by her, or one of the Carrows? At least I have some sympathy for my flesh and blood when I am myself. Once I am brought into contact with her soul I am lost to it, I may speak for her, but I also speak from the darkest places of myself: I can’t be set free and if I go back to Azkaban I am as good as dead, here I am a leader and I can’t say I don’t believe in the new order; I’d just prefer to wait until my family can join me at the top, rather than be the foundation.”

Draco looked wounded, but he set his jaw and held his tongue; he didn’t say a word about destroying the Horcrux and simply nodded his head to acknowledge his Father’s words. She hoped they had sunk in.

She knew how it felt to be affected by Tom Riddle, she couldn’t imagine how it would have felt to be forcibly controlled. The power Bellatrix offered among the other pureblood nobility was a sweet, enticing counteractive to the submission required of her host, something a fallen death eater would lap up willingly if it meant heralding a restoration of status (and Lucius Malfoy had the furthest to go to reinstate himself).

The only thing she could trust in now was that Lucius wanted his son out of harm’s way, but that he had his own motivation and reasoning.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

please let me know if you're liking this, it gives me endless confidence getting feedback or kudos

next chapter should be up very soon, it's been a hectic couple of weeks but I feel like my axis is shifting back to the norm so updates will be much quicker as my motivation returns :)}
Confused, bewildered, flummoxed… so many synonyms to describe how Draco was feeling listening to his father practically beg him to escape. Outright admitting he wanted him out of the way if only for his own agenda, it was still the most care his father had ever shown for him. He had never thought Lucius capable of such emotion and it scared him to think about why his father was having such a change of heart.

But right now, a change of heart was exactly what was needed to get himself and Hermione out unscathed. She was right when she said they needed to live and fight another day, he had to warn Theo and Blaise and the rest of his Slytherin family what was coming; otherwise they had zero chance of keeping themselves safe, they couldn’t rely on or expect the help of the ministry, history being written by the victors is a saying that runs far deeper than just an account of a war; no one talks about how the losers are treated after the fact.

In a move that rocked him to his core, his father tendered his escape plan. It was never going to be easy, but he found his courage thinking about how Hermione had risked it all to come for him. He was going to be absconding in broad daylight and he couldn’t even joke about being a thief in the night while he was at it. The plan was to simply walk out when the death eaters left to attack the Goyle residence in the morning. No one would be around to notice he was missing and they would be far too busy ‘initiating’ their new recruit to worry about him; if they failed, they would be far too busy hearing from Bellatrix to check up on him. it was the best chance he had

As much as they had grown apart after the war, he didn’t want to see Greg hurt. Gregory Goyle was more than met the eye and was ultimately a good friend. He had shared in much of Draco’s torment and while most considered him stupid he was, in actual fact a genuine, shy and polite person who started out as a political attachment and ended up becoming an understanding confidant and someone Draco could rely on.

The thought of the death eaters interrupting the life his friend was trying to rebuild made him sick to
his stomach. If he couldn’t motivate himself for Hermione, he could sure as hell do it for his friends who were next on the list. If they were taken, they would be at an immediate disadvantage. None of them had been truly present when Voldy was at his strongest and while they were cunning enough to figure out how to keep themselves alive and useful, he wasn’t sure if they would be so lucky as to escape. It wasn’t as though any of them were going to buy this new order bullshit, but if they ended up here they wouldn’t have much of a choice but to play along.

oOo

It bothered him that Hermione wouldn’t leave, she could easily slip out the window, but she was insistent on staying the night and following him out in the morning. Once his father had retired for the evening, she had recast wards, sent a patronus to his mother telling her to keep the Aurors away until the afternoon and taken off her cloak, settling in. All the worry he had been holding in since she arrived came crashing down. He had tried so hard to ignore the terror at the thought of her being captured, and he wasn’t above lying or insulting her to see her safe.

His first attempt was to convince her he was tricking her into thinking he hadn’t changed, that he was where he wanted to be. He thought playing into what might be an insecurity would work; It earned him a well-deserved, crisp slap to the face and a stern warning about not crying wolf. He knew it hurt her and he hated that he even tried it, but in a way, it was a relief to know she didn’t believe him. It didn’t mean he was giving up though, he had hours to convince her to leave Provence.

Sometime later they were still arguing, and it had escalated to the point of multiple silencing charms. They had argued plenty over the years and bickered plenty but this was something else; the first real fight they’d had that had an indeterminate outcome.

“Don’t you get it? You fucking Gryffindors and your lack of self-preservation. If things go wrong tomorrow you won’t be getting out of here ever! They’ll strengthen the wards and then what? You stay under the cloak and hope for the best?”

“I’m still not leaving, and you won’t convince me otherwise. You need someone to watch your back and we are a team Draco Malfoy, I will not abandon you… or have you forgotten?”

“No, I haven’t. Want to know what else I haven’t forgotten? the screams of the women some of the men downstairs tortured and raped. You think Aunt Bella was cruel? there are worse things; You’re naïve if you think they will give you a quick death… You think I want to stand there and watch that? I’d rather die, frankly I’d rather Avada you myself before I let that happen. So, you are going out that window like it or not, because I. Am. Not. FUCKING PLAYING AROUND!”

She snapped her jaw shut and he saw tears start to pool in the corners of her eyes. He wished he could take back what he said, but if it meant she was going to get it through her stubborn head that her stupid cloak and misguided courage wasn’t going to keep her alive, he would take whatever punishment she deemed fit.

Apparently, silence was the dealer’s choice and it was utterly crushing. Fighting with her was better than her silent tears. He ran a hand over his face, trying to stave off the guilt and exhaustion creeping in. He wasn’t about to back down, but he knew he had gone too far, his posture slumped in defeat but his tone remained the same.

“I know firsthand the things men like Dolohov and Yaxley like to do to women and a prize like you would certainly receive their twisted idea of special treatment; Hermione, you just didn’t seem to realize what’s on the line if you’re caught, what they’d make you do before you begged for death.”

He covered his face with his hands as he tried to push the memories back into their tightly sealed
box, hidden in the recesses of his subconscious. Sitting on the edge of the bed, He pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes hard enough to see phosphenes dance across his eyelids; physically trying to push away the images of those women who now looked far too much like Hermione.

He hadn’t really thought about the fact that it hurt until he felt her warm hands enveloping his, the bruises there smarted and throbbed anew and yet he pressed harder still and pulled away from her, feeling detached from reality. She tugged gently, pulling his hands away and clasped them tightly in her own as she moved to sit in his lap. She let him go when he attempted to wrap his arms around her; and as always, she leaned into him. Cuddling and arguing was rather an interesting development though.

oOo

“You won’t lose me and if you dare suggest it’s because I’m delicate Merlin knows you’ll be in for a world of hurt. I know you want to say that I can’t be sure, but as much as you want me to leave, I want to stay; for exactly the same reasons. I can’t leave and hope you make it out tomorrow morning… if I’m here I can help, even if it causes you to worry, at least we’re facing it all together. Don’t shake your head at me, it’s not your choice to make!”

She made her point by crushing her lips to his while he was still processing his next argument. Her frustration manifested in the way she bit his lip and pulled his hair. It opened up some instinct he hadn’t known existed until now; he rather liked the dichotomy of their usually sweet manner, compared to the punishing lust he was experiencing now.

It wasn’t logical, but he was just going to have to accept that she wasn’t leaving. Even if it made him feel like he was prone to a heart attack at any time. Honestly, he was a little surprised she had gone from one extreme to the other. Fighting with him to wanting to jump him. He would be lying if he didn’t say that bickering with her didn’t leave him a little aroused. But in the midst of a full-blown fight, sex hadn’t been on his mind.

She moved from his lips to his newly healed throat, biting and kissing feverishly. He didn’t know when he got the bruises there, and he wondered when he had blacked out; before or after being strangled. Either way, he hadn’t realised how painful they had been, just to move his head strained the bruised skin, getting into a yelling match certainly hadn’t done him any good. Now she was working at replacing the bruises she had healed with marks of her own and he wasn’t about to stop her when it felt so damn delectable.

He knew it was pushing the boundaries of appropriate not mention the time and place was far from ideal; but the more she touched him, the more his rationality switched off. Running a hand up her ribs and brushing his fingers just below the wire of her bra he quickly realised he wasn’t the only one losing the battle of brain over body. She practically purred and he knew that whatever this was building to was something neither of them expected to experience: That all-encompassing need for touch that came with the possibility of separation or death.

oOo

It was foreign and maybe a little wrong, Merlin knows it was badly timed but before he even knew what was happening he was pressing her into the mattress. True to their humour, but not enough to break the tension, she managed to joke about the fact that death eaters were so bourgeois they had a bed. Between heated kisses, he managed to bite back and ask if they were going for hate sex, make-up sex or ‘fucking before we die’ because he wanted to know which to check off his list. She caught that he was kidding, and it earned him a wolfish grin as she attacked the buttons of his shirt with more fervour than he thought possible at a time like this.
Her clothes were left sprawled over a number of surfaces and she was working his belt off as he nipped and sucked, in no particular pattern down her neck and across her chest. His trousers had been uncomfortably tight, and he jolted the moment she palmed his bare length. Skimming a hand up her thigh and glancing down, it was clear that fighting with him had left her more than a little stimulated. The sight of her was mouthwatering.

As much as he was lost in a haze of his own frustration and lust, he wasn’t about to skip making sure she was ready, he would never want to hurt her. He was all too easy to please and she was working him up to something transcendent with her hands; however, he was a gentleman and he wasn’t about to continue without knowing she wanted to, but he certainly wasn’t about to let her off easy.

She was seeking any kind of friction as he massaged her inner thighs, pointedly avoiding where he knew she wanted him; his mouth was occupied, rolling one of her peaked nipples between his teeth and she was making the most lovely sounds as she tried to keep herself from begging.

It didn’t take long before the first ‘please’ escaped her, followed by a litany of curses as she pleaded for something more; anything more. As much as he was still awkward and learning; what she had started, he had needed; more than she had counted on. He needed her to submit for once, just so he could come to terms with her stubborn decision to stay and put her life on the line.

“You. Drive. Me. Insane, but seeing as you asked so nicely…”

He stroked up from her entrance to her clit and she went stiff as a board when he added a little pressure to where she was most sensitive. Leaving open-mouthed kisses down her abdomen, he wasted no time repeating the movement with his tongue. He wasn’t sweet about it this time, he was efficient and perhaps a little harsh. Slipping one finger and then another into her tight, wet heat, he held her down as she shuddered under his touch. For a moment he let himself slip back to reality; only to thank his lucky stars that they had taken the time to educate each other properly; he knew exactly how to make her scream.

What had started as small moans and breathy pants had quickly become far more obscene. He was almost fascinated at how her wetness shone in the low light as he drew his fingers out. Taking a moment to taste her, he was reminded of how painfully hard he was and all of a sudden, he had to be inside her.

Quickly wiping the back of his hand over his mouth he moved back up and took in the sight of her; glowing with a slight sheen of sweat, her hair wild and her cheeks flushed. Apparently, his assessment took too long, because, in the most Hermione way possible she told him to get on with it, he was too far gone to worry about her ordering him.

“Draco Malfoy if you aren’t inside me in two seconds I swea- uuhhhh!”

He didn’t let her finish her sentence. It took all the confidence he had to sink into her in one fell swoop. But the fact she showed no sign of pain or concern allowed him to keep going. Pulling almost all the way out and snapping his hips forward, filling her again, he almost came at the sight of her breasts bouncing with the force of his thrust, and again when her breath left her in a strangled grunt that had her raking her nails down his back to pull him closer.

Till now things had been tender and sweet; This suited them better. Uninhibited, intense and passionate it was everything they were expressed physically. She gave as much as she got and met him halfway on every hard stroke, both letting him fuck her and using him in turn. It was as much making love as it was mindless sex; years of tension and the newfound mutual love and respect they had for one another allowed it to be the perfect mix. He didn’t have to whisper sweet nothings to encourage her while he fucked her into the mattress, she knew what was in his heart and the same was true for her (frankly her mouth was filthier than his and he adored it).
Caging her in, he sucked and bit at her throat and shoulders; she begged him to go harder and he caught her moan on his tongue as he obliged. Working a hand between them he began to rub tight circles around her clit and she returned the favour, biting his shoulder to stop from crying out (he didn’t feel it). She hadn’t climaxed yet, but she was incredibly close. He didn’t realise he had spoken his next thought aloud, only when she responded did he figure out that he ordered her not to come until he told her to.

“I won’t, I’ll be g-good, uhh, I pr-promise”

Her words went straight to his cock and he tensed slightly (he could take pride in lasting later, he was far too preoccupied now), she must have noticed the bewildered expression on his face because she lifted a hand to smooth his furrowed brow, reassuring him she was happy to play along, without breaking character.

Pressing the pad of his thumb to his tongue to moisten it, he returned to his ministrations, circling her clit the same way he had seen her do it. She bucked, and her inner muscles fluttering added the perfect amount of pressure.

“Draco, puh-please, do that againn- ohh.”

Another jolt… and another… and another; he knew he couldn’t hold off his own release for more than a few seconds and hers was just about to hit her as she had so dutifully informed him. With no small amount of satisfaction he told her to let go and seconds later she did.

Her walls pulsing around him drew him into his own orgasm and he buried his face in the crook of her neck. Still riding out her own bliss as he throbbed inside her, she wound her fingers into the fine hair at the nape of his neck and clung to him like her last lifeline.

He didn’t stay on top of her long not wanting her to be uncomfortable with his weight. Returning to his senses he muttered a wandless cleaning charm as he pulled out of her and slotted in beside her utterly spent.

oOo

The haze of anger and lust now thoroughly dissipated, he held her close and peppered gentle kisses down her bare shoulder to her fingers and back up. Just because he had discovered that he liked things a little rough, didn’t mean he wanted to give up being affectionate in more peaceful ways.

The silence of the room was only interrupted by their tandem breathing and they were both avoiding talking about the possibility of tomorrow. But something needed to be said, he just had to work up to it.

“I didn’t hurt you? did I? because if I di-”

“Merlin, no! I’m more than perfect. I needed that.”

“Oh, ok then; because I needed it too. I know its twisted, but I needed the trust and control you gave me… Merlin, Hermione it terrifies me to think I could lose the one thing that makes me want to live. I know its not my choice to make, but you’re giving me no say at all when I have real reasons to worry.”

“I understand. It was selfish of me to ignore what you were warning me about. I shouldn’t have pushed you, I’m sorry. But I also can’t leave you; after everything I’ve been through I couldn’t trust myself to keep my own hope alive. Every second knowing you might be caught or killed would be agony and I would bear any hardship to make sure that if it came to it there was nothing more I
could have done.”

After everything that had transpired, he finally understood. He was the stubborn one. Pushing her away, refusing her help was a slight to her. He let his own agenda cloud the fact that her adamant protestations had been her defence mechanism; she needed to be with him to protect herself as much as she needed to protect him, both needed were inextricably linked.

Having cleared the air and with little energy left, he held her as tight as he dared and let her fall asleep safe in his arms, with a promise that come what may he would never leave her behind either.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

as always i adore feedback and i genuinely love replying to your comments and questions so feel free to send them my way. or drop me a kudos, those are amazing too and make my day a million times more wonderful.

till next time

xo Em
Chapter 28

Chapter Summary

Back to Hermione's POV.

One or two warnings for general villainy and blood/semi-descriptive medical magic.

Chapter Notes

Life is being a real B at the moment and I can't seem to get enough time to do solid writing. Which means going back and rewriting/fixing things from the last time I found time for the sake of coherency.

It's a bit of a heavy chapter but things are working out and I'm going to get into the nitty-gritty of the aftermath in the next chapter, while also bringing back the regularly programmed fluff.

The arc is shaping up to be a bit of a rollercoaster on a steady incline. This is just the first hill. There's more to come and eventually a showdown, allowing me to further develop some of the other characters in this fic in relation to our fave couple :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

It was well before dawn when she woke. Lying in the dark, Hermione could have laughed at just how drastically things had gone from one extreme to the other, they were utterly ridiculous. Recalling their school motto, she hadn't tickled the sleeping dragon she had driven him to breathing fire; and sweet Circe did she love to bask in the flames. Psychologically she had needed it just as much as he did; what they had been fighting about had been real and imperative and while she had been upset and hurt by his words, something switched in her as she watched him shatter, reliving the war, placing her in his past. All of a sudden, he wasn't being as unreasonable or overprotective; he was genuinely terrified. Being cared for so deeply had affected her and while it didn't mitigate her frustration, it changed the tone of it and she found herself wanting. It was the most poignant indicator of how far they had managed to come that she could come to such a conclusion so easily.

Ginny had been right, their love had to be a little bit blind to move on from the trauma of their shared past, but all that fighting and resentment built up over the years, left them both with a latent predilection for wanting to release pent-up emotions in such a manner once together. And maybe she got just the slightest thrill out of the fact that there was more to them than sweet and easy; equal opportunity to submit or control, messy feelings and complex reasoning... and it was all theirs to explore as they wished.

Frankly, if they hadn't both been exhausted, she would have loved to turn the tables on him, but she was asleep so fast she wondered if she had passed out. There was a lot that could go wrong once dawn broke and she wasn't so deluded as to think that his arguments hadn't been perfectly founded,
she had half expected him to tie the rope around her and shove her out the window, not giving a fig about her arguments, he damn well looked like he wanted to at one point; but he had conceded. She knew he was under immense pressure and she had still worn him down, putting him on the defensive so thoroughly he’d almost had a panic attack. She felt guilty about it now. At the time her conscious mind had screamed at her to compromise; her body, on the other hand, had interesting thoughts on what said compromise should entail. After making intentions clear she had been more than willing to give him what he needed once he joined her. Somehow through it all, she still felt cherished, but she had surprised herself immeasurably enjoying the way he ordered her about a little. She trusted him enough not to feel ashamed of it and more than enough to play along; that in itself was a triumph.

Watching the sky lighten through the window as another hour ticked by, she delved deeper into her own head. Before long the sky turned an inky indigo, which gradually lightened to a gilded dusty pink. It was almost time. Pulling herself from her musings she pressed a kiss to Draco’s bare shoulder and got up to dress (thank Merlin for strong locking charms, she didn’t have to worry about being interrupted).

Summoning the invisibility cloak, she wrapped it around her shoulders ready to pull the hood over herself at a moments notice. There were few things she had to manage before she needed to wake him. She sent another patronus to Narcissa, instructing it to speak only when she was alone, she then sent her otter on its way with a summary of their plan (she really needed to teach Draco the spell, it was ever so convenient). Next the wards; She didn’t like having to take the locking charms or barriers off. The cold, creeping vulnerability in her veins was unsettling; but if someone was to attempt opening the door, they would have been done for. Crossing the room, she transfigured the makeshift ropes and harness back into their original forms (she didn’t repair the footholds, just in case). Last but not least, she grabbed her beaded bag and summoned a small vial of a certain luck potion she had been saving for a rainy day. The weather was fine, but if there was ever a time for Felix Felicis, well, this was it.

It felt like she was a gnat caught in tree sap, time moved so slowly she wondered if it had turned to amber. Perhaps it was just her nerves? Even though she was dressed and wrapped up in the cloak, she carefully slid back into the bed, propped up on one arm, used her free hand to gently card her fingers through Draco’s now sun-warmed hair. It was the gentlest way she could think to wake him, and they had time; never enough, but time all the same.

She was paying close attention as each lock shimmered in the light almost reflecting it, he had stirred slightly but she couldn’t stop looking at the way the colour changed as the shadow of her hand met morning light. She could tell the moment he was awake, but she let him think she wasn’t aware as she moved to brush her thumb over his brow. He relaxed and let out a sigh that sounded more like ‘I love you.’ She knew the reason she was so intent on studying him was to memorise the life he exuded. She did the same thing with Harry and Ron.

He moved his head to look at her as she said it back and she internalized a grimace as the thought crossed her mind that it might be the last time. Despite all the storm clouds gathering over their heads his smile was radiant and it chased away those pesky thoughts, just for a moment.

He dressed quickly, and she could see the jitters set in as the clock counted the seconds aloud; she knew his tells well enough; bouncing his leg, rubbing his thumb over the side of his forefinger, stopping to crack his knuckles and repeating the process even though the joints wouldn’t crack. She had her own and she was sure he noticed them as well. He looked pensive and in a quiet almost timid voice she asked what was on his mind hoping the conversation might relieve the growing tension over what was to come.
“I'm just sorry for insulting you the way I did last night, better late than never to make an apology. I said a lot of hurtful things, I wish I could take back. What you said about crying wolf… you were right, and I reacted poorly to you making an informed choice to stay. For the longest time, I've only known how it felt to be deserted and I pushed you away thinking I could save myself from being left behind again. But at the same time, I wanted nothing more than to keep you safe, so I pushed even harder thinking I was doing right by you and me. Then when you- when we... Merlin’s beard I can do all that and I can’t find the right words to talk about it. Last night, I couldn’t help but wonder if you were saying goodbye, but I felt your conviction, it was the ultimate full stop and I won’t deny I needed that from you.”

She took a moment to consider his words. Not one to hold grudges (anymore), she had mostly forgiven him, he was human and bound to make mistakes, he’d gone so far as to warn her that he would; but she didn’t expect perfection, just honesty and that was what he gave. Hearing it in his words, rather than making assumptions revealed yet another thread that made up the tapestry of his personality. She was rather pleasantly assured that almost any string she pulled led back to how he felt about her.

Ignoring the armchairs, they sat on the edge of the bed close enough they could feel each other’s body heat. Reaching out from under the cloak she took his hand and they waited in silence for Lucius Malfoy to fetch them.

Good Godric, she hoped they could trust him. To be betrayed now would be certain death. At least she could trust that Narcissa would have Aurors ready to meet them in Arles to get them back to England as per her message.

At exactly half-past eight, there was a triplicated rap on the door and panic flared in both of them as Draco went to answer. She followed close behind him and was equally puzzled by the lack of a knocker. Checking the coast was clear she saw his demeanour change on a knut as (she wished she knew how to hide her emotions like that) as she followed him just able to make out the slight tell of his movements under a disillusionment charm, down the winding halls, down the staircase and into the main hall.

There were two house elves cleaning up from breakfast, but thankfully no death eaters. Draco stopped for a moment to ask them not to mention they had seen him and once he straightened he looked around as though he had forgotten she was invisible. Catching himself he smiled nervously and pressed on. The chateau was a winding mess of passageways and halls and she remembered reading something about pureblood homes being enchanted to confuse anyone who didn’t know the place intimately. Only then did she realise that one could easily find their way in, the way had been deceptively clear; the real trap was getting back out.

Draco seemed to know the way well enough, the passages and halls widened and grew lighter as they progressed. Finally, they reached the large, oak front door. She gently squeezed his arm, just to let him know she was there and after checking the enchantments, she set to work with her skeleton key charm, bringing each one down.

They were actually going to do it! she could hardly believe it had been so-

‘Were those voices?’ She didn’t wait to pull the cloak over Draco. pulling him by the back of his shirt they half tripped into the space behind the door. She wondered if every close call was down to felix doing its job, frankly it didn't seem to be helping that much

Now closer she could just make out what the disembodied voices were saying; they were celebrating. She felt Draco stiffen as he heard them taunt their newest captive. ‘They weren’t supposed to be back so quickly!’ she thought frantically. Surely it hadn’t taken that long to make
their way here? She could sense things going very wrong all too quickly. The death eaters burst through the doors, dragging a beaten and bloodied Gregory Goyle in behind them; cats with a half-dead mouse to present to their master.

She kept her arms wound tight around his torso just enough to help lessen the strain he was putting his body under resisting helping his friend. This wasn’t supposed to happen, it was all too easy to think that if the death eaters succeeded they could send in the Aurors to help once they were safe. But watching it all happen stirred something in both of them that neither could ignore. They couldn’t leave him behind now.

oOo

They crept along behind the group of merrymaking death eaters. Well, merry for them anyway. She didn’t risk a glance back, Draco with an arm around her kept her moving forward. They followed down three flights of stairs and tracked their way through the cavernous set up of the cellars. High archways and lit sconce torches created a fearful ambience, a shiver ran up her spine; dark things lurked in the shadows here, she could tell.

“It’s ok Hermione, listen the footsteps have stopped, we’re close to the cells.”

She nodded, not wanting to risk her voice betraying her, when his had been impossibly less than a whisper. Slipping into an alcove where they could see the death eaters they watched and waited for them to disperse. However, it seemed they weren’t done taunting their prisoner before their mistress got to him.

More than a few nasty spells were shot through the bars, some that she had never even heard of, but with a memory like hers she wouldn’t be forgetting them any time soon, ever the practical one she knew it might save his life when they got him to Mungos. It reminded her of her first trip to Australia to things up for her parents; she had been reading a brochure that dealt with various bites and stings one could receive; apparently, it was imperative to describe or identify what caused the injury to ensure better treatment. Those words had been true for magic as well, so the war had taught her all too well.

They watched the group’s numbers dwindle leaving only Dolohov and Amycus Carrow behind. The lack of screaming, crying or whimpering told her Goyle must have finally passed out.

“Ugh, how boring it is when they do that. I much prefer a lively subject, don’t you?”

“Quite so Amicus.”

The two men breezed past their hiding place, disappearing up the stairs, leaving them to do what they could to fix the broken silhouette of Draco’s childhood friend. They approached the bars carefully and Goyle must have been awake enough to hear the rustle of Hermione stepping out from under the cloak when he pleaded softly for mercy.

“We aren’t going to hurt you, Draco’s here with me, and you remember me, right? I’m not going to hurt you either; we’re going to get you out of here.”

She started the incantation to unlock the door and stepped calmly inside, not wanting to distress him when he didn’t trust her. Draco cast a Lumos over them and she almost retched at the sight before her. It seemed one of the curses she hadn’t known had the effect of thousands of tiny cuts all over his body, his face was the worst; Draco said exactly what she was thinking;

“Someone modified sectumsempra.”
In the dim light, his face was ashen, he knelt behind Goyle’s head and propped him up so he could breathe easier; slotting his knees under his shoulders to support his weight. His hands came away from his friend’s head bloodied and she saw him blanch at the sight.

“The counter curse is vulnera sanetur.”

She ignored the tremble in his voice and started repeating the phrase, it wouldn’t work on all the lesions at the same time, so she had to spell each of them shut individually and cast an anti-scarring charm when she had finished. Draco studied the diagnostic charm setting about healing what he could. Things looked pretty grim and she knew she was out of her depth when the spell indicated head trauma. After a pain potion (or three), they had used rennervate more times than she could count, needing him to stay conscious; she put it down to luck that he stayed that way. Finally, she managed to stop most of the bleeding and cast a Tergeo to clear the drying blood from his skin; Draco had done an excellent job managing to repair his punctured lung, then clear the fluid causing a horrid rattling sound when he drew breath. Using ‘Ferula’ to splint his broken right femur, it seemed now was as good a time as any to move him.

Draco hooked his arms under Goyle’s torso, trying not to cause too much pain and managed to support his weight as Goyle sagged against him. They needed to get out and fast. Using wingardium leviosa and a modified engorgio, she levitated the cloak above their heads, put Goyle’s free arm gently over her shoulder and draped the cloak over the three of them. ‘Thank Godric I stole this thing,’ she thought with a bitter laugh.

Well and truly in warrior mode, she hadn’t stopped to think about how much her strength had depleted after casting so many healing charms or about what to do next, her mind and body exhausted she was running on Felix, adrenaline and instinct, all three waning fast. Draco led them back out of the dungeons as fast as he dared, he had to hunch over to allow for her height difference needing help carrying deadweight. It was slow going as they wound their way back, stopping multiple times to let some death eater or other by, they used the main hall as their base point, finding the front door much quicker. All the spell-work she had done had been nullified once the door had resealed, she started again, from scratch and as soon as she muttered the last word, cast a silencing charm on the hinges and pulled the door open wide enough for them to slip through.

She thanked every good wizard and god they made it out. The temptation to kill every death eater they crossed had been high, but it would have wasted time. The only one she would have stopped to kill was Alecto and even that depended on her wearing the eye or not. She would leave it to the professionals, she’d done enough of their job for them already.

She knew it was a risk, but the second they broke through the wards it occurred to her she had no idea where to go next. Wide-eyed and frantic she asked Draco what to do. He didn’t worry about calming her, but she could see the wheels turning in his mind and that was enough, seconds later with a gasp of surprise, she felt the pull of apparition and a jolt as they landed in what seemed to be a tavern.

“She didn’t think of it sooner.” she whispered suspiciously, looking around at the chairs stacked on tables, spotting the unoccupied bar in the corner.

“It’s alright love, we’re in Lyon, more specifically a tavern owned by Blaise’s cousin, its closed over winter while she’s with the family in England. I came here a few summers ago… Can’t believe I didn’t think of it sooner.”

She hadn’t noticed the dead hearth until it roared to life. Relief washed over her when she saw the floo powder. They could safely get to St. Mungos, no apparition needed, she could have kissed him then and there for thinking of it.
Still keeping her eyes peeled for trouble, she breathed a tentative sigh of relief, they were mostly unscathed but there were sure to be some cranky dark wizards on their trail and that bode well for no one. Goyle was still semi-conscious, as long as he kept groaning, he was awake and that was the best either of them could do for now. She struggled to help Draco get him into the fireplace with a fuzzy sounding shout they disappeared in a torrent of green flames only to stumble into the foyer of the hospital.

She was so relieved she didn’t realise she was passing out until her vision went blurry and faded to black.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

hope you've enjoyed this chap, it was a fun one to write :)

Every chapter I encourage feedback and comments, I genuinely love hearing what you all think so keep them coming.

I got my first negative comment on this fic the other day and honestly, I didn't even care, something my anxiety practically mandates I do; but not this time (muhaha). That's all thanks to you lovely people leaving kudos and kind encouragements/thoughts, so a massive THANK YOU and virtual hugs all around.

till next time.

xo Em
It was official, Draco Malfoy hated hospitals. He hated the smell, the lighting, the constant noise and chatter, but most of all he hated healers.

Incompetent, smarmy, rude people who seemed to get off on making loved ones of their patients suffer. There had been three healers in the lobby when Hermione fainted and not one made a move to help her (or Greg for that matter). For a split second he thought maybe his rolled-up sleeves had deterred them, but no; they were just three dumb bints in healer’s robes with matching ‘deer in headlights’ stares.

When someone did finally manage to attend to them, Draco had been pushed into a waiting room with very little information or concern. Bone tired after expending so much energy healing his friend, he used his paper crane spell to send a note to his mother and collapsed onto a very uncomfortable looking bench.

Next thing he knew he was rudely awakened by none other than scar-head himself. Tumbling off the bench in a rather ungraceful manner after such a fright, it took longer than he liked to admit that he really had think about where he was.

“She’s fine, just fainted; no concussion, but she depleted her magical wellspring quite a bit so she’s in for the night.”

“Thanks, they wouldn’t tell me anything; not family or some tripe like that, you know how it is.”
He tried to keep any hint of sarcasm out of using Potter’s name and the small smirk the raven-haired boy shot at him clearly meant he hadn’t quite succeeded, but it didn’t matter; he was making an effort and he wasn’t about to insult the messenger with good news regarding the girl he loved.

Next thing he knew, Potter was offering him a hand up and they were sitting on the bench making small talk. Though it didn’t last long, Potter dragged him into the small cafeteria and plied him with whatever hot meal happened to be on the menu despite his protests. he didn’t have to wonder why for all that long.

“I know what you're thinking Malfoy. She asked me to check up on you, make sure you ate something; the way she demanded that I do it... they tortured you, didn’t they?”

“Yeah... They did. My own father actually; not that it’s the first time- I didn’t want her to see, but I haven’t perfected wandless healing spells yet and I didn’t know she was coming.”

“Geez Malfoy, that’s heavy. If you don’t mind me asking; how bad was it?”

“I suppose it's going to end up in some report or other, once your lot stuff veritaserum down my throat; it ranked top three, right under your sectumsempra and the day they marked me. She saw the physical stuff, healed most of it. Some wounds I don’t even remember getting; the last thing I actually remember was standing up to my father while he crucioed me and wishing I’d die.”

Why he was choosing to tell Potter all this, Draco had no idea. They weren’t exactly friends, but somehow his rival managed to look at him in this way that made him feel understood.

“There’ll be no need for veritaserum, I'm the junior Auror assigned to take your statement. I figured you might prefer to talk about this unimpaired. It’s personal and I don’t think its right to force you to go through it all blow by blow.”

“Why would you help me?”

“I knew you’d ask that. First, we’re quite alike on the shitty family front and I can tell the contradictions and questions eat at you the same way. The second is because I have my evidence. You made sure Hermione wasn’t abducted, got her out of there safely and stumbled in here with a half dead Goyle between you, which I’m still baffled by, considering that you’re clearly still dealing with after-effects of the cruciatus. What I’m saying is, I can respect you for all that and you don’t deserve to be treated like a villain after the past few days.”

“I'm amazed Potter, sounds like you just paid me a compliment...Yeah, yeah I know, enemies for life and all that, doesn’t mean I'm your friend etc. etc... Still, you're not as much of a prat as I tho-.”

Potter stuck his hand out abruptly and Draco being Draco automatically shook his hand, though it went on for a bit longer than the usual, he could pick a tentative new beginning when he saw one.

“Neither are you and I think I can tell the wrong sort for myself, thanks.”

Draco was a little dumbfounded, jolted into his memory only to pull himself back in time to see Potter smirk and wink. ‘Well, this is surreal.’ he thought, as their loud laughter burst out cutting through the silence in the room and the halls beyond them.

Draco had no intention of going home with Hermione stuck in Mungos overnight. He knew it was illogical, but he wasn’t leaving her behind; then there was Goyle, no family to speak of, he was here alone, and Draco intended to be there for him when he woke up. The bench still looked unappealing
but apparently, Harry wasn’t leaving either, so there they sat in the waiting room having the most mundane, civil conversation ever; just passing the time ‘til morning.

Naturally they talked about Quidditch, which very soon shifted into discussing old wins and losses from their time playing against each other; no one was there to see the way they laughed like fools over the time Potter caught the snitch in his mouth, only to find themselves wiping away tears as Potter recounted how that had ended up being significant.

Potter was strangely easy to talk to but there were questions burning the tip of Draco’s tongue, he just had to work up to asking them. He waited for a lull and jumped in the deep end.

“How did you know it was my father?”

“Dobby didn’t really have a filter. He told me about some of the stuff Lucius did when you were a kid, it made sense it was him this time or you wouldn’t look so messed up about it.”

“Oh, I see…I miss that elf. He wasn’t always so barmy; that was my father’s doing… Dobby was a kind elf, he didn’t deserve how my father treated him. I’m glad you freed him… D’you mind if I ask what happened to you? I mean it’s alright if you don’t want to tell me, I get it; but I’d like to understand why you think we’re similar.”

“Nah, it’s okay, I don’t like to talk about it, but I guess it saves having the conversation later, or Hermione telling you. I didn’t have the easiest homelife- Merlin what am I saying; I slept in a cupboard under the stairs which they also liked to lock me in, had bars put on the window to stop me ‘escaping’, grew up underfed, unprovided for, ignored and bullied; I mean who gives a kid a single tissue as a gift? They tried to stop me going to Hogwarts too, Dumbledore sent Hagrid to sort it out… He gave my cousin a pig’s tail; I’d never laughed so hard in all my life… You and I both know how it feels to have the people raising you abuse the power they’re given, and I can tell it bothers you as much as it bothers me.”

“Fuck, Potter, it’s a miracle you made it to the platform.”

“Oh, well I almost didn’t; they abandoned me at the station and I didn’t know how to get through; that’s how I met the Weasleys actually, they sort of rescued me. I can’t say the Dursleys ever hit me, but they managed to fuck me up fine-and-dandy without resorting to real violence.”

“Sheesh, that’s harsh. But at least some good came of it, they’re your family now, you’re lucky in that regard. It’s hard not to sound bitter about the fact I’ll never find that, not that I ever would have before my life went to shit, but still, it would have been nice to feel-.”

He sucked in a sharp breath and quickly cut off that train of speech. There was no way in hell he was going to unpack how jealous he was over how loved Potter was by the Weasley family; it was all he’d ever wanted for himself, all the venom he spat at the Weasleys growing up, was born of his shameful desire to have the loving family they did. Draco had wealth, power, prestige but there were times when he would gladly have given it all up to be a poor, daggy, redhead if it meant he experienced half the love and affection that family held for one another.

He changed direction and decided it was safer to simply point out what he understood of Potter’s observation;

“Did you ever notice our lives are filled with equal opposites. You were locked in a cupboard and starved, I got the same treatment, only difference being that the cell you were thrown in last time you were in the Manor, used to be reserved for me; your family did horrible things, deprived you, but never hit you, I got the cane and the crucio and I had everything I could want or need… I don’t
really like to think about what if’s, too easy to lose myself in daydreams; but if being with Hermione has taught me anything, it’s that all those years, all I needed was someone to show me I was worth caring about enough to help. You had that and look how you turned out.”

“You’re right, we are two sides of the same galleon. I still think about how I might have ended up if I never found Ron and Hermione. I can see how she helps you; We would never have sat down and had this conversation if it weren’t for her dragging you back into my life. But I guess you oughta know I think you’re worth helping too. I wouldn’t have stood up at your trial if I didn’t, I just needed to get over myself a little after that.”

“Tsk, look, Harry it’s not like I can hold that against you, I’ve been a prat to you and yours for most of our lives; for what it’s worth, I’m incredibly sorry for it. I’ve said and done a lot of horrible things, so I’ll ask you the same thing I asked Hermione when I first apologised to her; I’d like the chance to earn your forgiveness, rather than receive token words that don’t mean a damn thing.”

“I think I can give you that Draco, but can we please go back to the last names thing; it’s too weird.”

“Fuck, I know right!”

“Hey Potter, can I ask something else?”

“Sure, why not?”

“How on earth do I do this with Weasely?”

Potter snorted, and the knowing look Draco received told him everything he needed to know about how ‘in the know’ the-boy-who-lived was.

“Ron has always been sort of stubborn and he doesn’t quite know what to make of all the change going on, he feels left out. He’s set in his ways, much the same as you were. Then there’s the fact he’s still in love with Hermione; throw in his boyhood rival as her current beau and it’s a recipe for a punch in the nose. I think with a bit of cunning from the three of us, we might be able to get him to sit down and have a civil conversation. I should probably thank you for knocking some sense into him though, when he told me what he said to her, I was tempted to give him a shiner to match. He got the message though; I expect he’ll pop round soon to set things right with ’Mione.”

“He made her cry, I let him off easy. I warned him after the interview incident not to hurt her by making her choose between his beliefs and her forgiving nature, but he didn’t listen. If I wasn’t so selfish I’d have removed myself to make it easier, but she wouldn’t let me. I know it didn’t help my standing with him, but I really want to try, for her sake to make amends. It’s just that he’s Everest at this point.”

“He’ll be a tough nut to crack, but if you’re willing to work at it, I think it’ll pay off.”

“Thanks Potter, surprisingly that helps, though I do find myself wondering what your idea of a ‘bit of cunning’ entails?”

“Oh well that’s easy, we trap him in a room until he participates. He doesn’t really respond well to subtlety.”

“And Hermione will go for it?”

“Of course, do you honestly think she’d want to miss out on that showdown. Honestly, I’m still disappointed I didn’t get to see the look on his face when he found out about you two.”
“Well, I’d imagine it would have been particularly satisfying considering how bad his timing was.”

“Oh god, as much as I don’t want details, I’m dying to know just how bad it really was.”

“He walked in just before I got to unwrap anything; sometime after play fighting became snogging but well before we got to the fun part.”

Potter seemed to choke on spit, before descending into hearty bellows of laughter. He managed to speak between guffaws and wheezing breaths;

“Did the little vein pop out on his forehead? Ooh, what about his colour, what shade did he turn? He caught me and Gin fooling around one time and I swear he went mauve, Hermione and I made a colour chart sometime around third year just to catalogue the colours… Wonder if we need to add a new one to it. What a shame I missed that!”

“You two made a colour chart for Weasley’s outbursts? That has to be the best thing I’ve heard all week! Why didn’t I think of that?”

“Yeah, for example, we matched him to puce when he found out Krum was taking her to the Yule ball. We had to add burgundy when he found out about it.”

“Potter, you really would have done well in Slytherin.”

oOo

They talked through the night, switching back and forth between topics of importance and nothing of great significance. Potter was, to Draco’s surprise, witty and mischievous and most importantly incredibly genuine.

By the time the pair had nodded off, they were fast becoming tentative friends. Harry had this strange ability to understand pain and turmoil in a way Draco had never experienced before. He was humble and self-deprecating but aware of the importance of confidence in a way that didn’t betray his humility. Draco found he really liked talking to him, conversation flowed easily, and he felt that he could trust him with his darker secrets, safe in the knowledge that Harry Potter had his own. And wasn’t that just the strangest part; Potter opening up to his once enemy about his nightmares and flaws, trusting Draco with knowledge given only to the closest of confidantes.

Tentative friends indeed.

oOo

The boys had no idea dawn had passed them by, though it was rather embarrassing to discover Potter had been drooling on his shoulder for some time. Unable to resist waking his former enemy with a shout, they quickly sought out breakfast and waited for Hermione to be discharged after her last round of tests. It didn’t take long, and she came out smiling, Harry’s cloak draped over her arm; it felt like the sun had stepped into the room. After a relieved, if awkwardly accidental group hug, the three of them apparated into Grimmauld place.

Harry had already grabbed their things from Hermione’s house and the reality of their escape didn’t hit him until he had a shower and changed his clothes. He would gladly have taken Hermione up on her offer to join him, but he still had flecks of Goyle’s blood under his nails, in his hair and Merlin knows where else. It twisted his stomach, right up until he couldn’t see a single reddish-brown fleck on his pale skin.

oOo
As soon as he was done, he owled his mother and went back to St. Mungos. She met him in the waiting room and he was subjected to a flurry of kisses and a bone-crushing hug. Most sons would swat their mothers away with bright red cheeks, alerting the world to their embarrassment. Draco was not most sons, affection-starved for most of his childhood, he relished in his mother showing her emotions toward him. She had been just as suppressed as he had, and she was certainly making up for lost time. Hugging her back just as fiercely, he felt her tears slide down his neck as she tried to reassure herself he was really there.

“It’s alright Mum, I’m here, I’m safe, no one can take me from you.”

“You didn’t follow! You were supposed to follow me…”

She slapped his arm and crushed him to her again. He wasn’t about to protest when she had every right to be mad.

“I’m so sorry Mum, but I got Greg out of there too, so it was lucky I stayed.”

“I know, I know; but you’re my son and you’re all I have. And I like you calling me mum so don’t you dare correct yourself, you hear me?”

He nodded and relaxed into hugging his Mum, feeling every bit the young boy he used to be before his father interfered.

Much later, having appeased his mother with apologies and promises never to put himself in such peril again (a promise he was certain he wouldn’t be able to keep with the death eaters evading capture), sitting next to each other in the waiting room for any news of Goyle, She was absentmindedly smoothing out his rather ruffled hair, looking up at him with that look only mothers have when they’re about to tell you to do something you may not want to.

“You need a haircut little Dragon.”

“I’ve been a little preoccupied of late, but if I let it get too long I start seeing him in the mirror so don’t worry.”

“I know sweetheart. I’m sorry… you also need to bring Hermione over for tea. Oh yes, don’t think I don’t know how you avoided telling me the two of you were together. That girl would go to the ends of the earth for you and I had to find out about her moments after she told me you had been kidnapped.”

If he got out of this without a hexing it would be a miracle. He had been meaning to tell his mother for some time, but it never felt right to do so in a letter. Then everything with the death eaters and her protective custody, still; he’d had plenty of time…

His mother seemed to have enough intuition to know what he was thinking, and she wasn’t about to let him get away with it.

“Did you think I wouldn’t accept her? Any woman willing to break her future mother in law out of a ministry cell, with no idea how she would be received thanks to your procrastination, to ask for assistance to perform a blood ritual, in order to find and rescue you, is as much my daughter as you are my son. Listen to your mother; don’t let this one get away, I like her far too much.”

“You did what!? That’s incredibly dark magic, where’d she even learn that?”

“You’ll have to ask her, smart girl that one, not that you haven’t been telling me that since you were eleven, I should have seen this coming sooner, it was always Hermione this and Hermione that.”
His mother smirked and chuckled, a sound he hadn’t heard in Circe knows how long.

“...And her spell work is practically an art form. No wonder the Potter boy let her go over the Auror’s heads. I expect you’ll be wanting a look through the vaults soon?”

“She’s amazing, isn’t she. But we’re not there yet Mum, don’t think I didn’t catch that mother in law comment... There’s still a lot I need to do before I’ll believe I'm good enough for her.”

“A diplomatic answer for your pushy mother. I taught you well. But you know, there's nothing wrong with a long engagement.”

“Muuum... So, you really like her then?”

“She’s wonderful Draco and if I didn’t, I doubt you would give a fig what I thought, nor would she for that matter. I don’t have to ask if she makes you happy, look at you.”

It was then a healer decided to interrupt them, clutching her clipboard the young woman looked nervously from him to his mother and if that wasn’t the perfect example of what he needed to fix before he’d ask Hermione to tie herself to his reputation, well... He couldn’t think of a better reason to wait.

“F-follow me please, Mr. Goyle has asked to see you.”

Draco stood and offered his mother a hand, looping her arm through his they walked in step to Goyle’s room. He looked better than he had, the scarring gone, now that he had access to advanced potions and salves, still pale though but after seeing his friend of death’s door it was a vast improvement.

“Hey Drake; Mrs. Malfoy, always a pleasure.”

“Oh, Gregory, none of that Mrs. Malfoy nonsense, I simply won’t hear it.”

Goyle nodded, looking only slightly awkward before getting to the point. He offered his thanks, asking to see Hermione at some point to do the same in person, he attempted to offer a life debt which Draco waved off with a laugh; as if he was going to stand by when his friend was in danger. That particular comment had left his friend in tears and Draco realised that unlike him, Goyle had no one coming for him, it was quite the bonding moment and Draco promised himself he wasn’t going to lose touch after this.

Narcissa had been the wildcard of the morning, fussing over his friend like one of her own (with the amount of time they had spent together over the years he practically was), before happily accepting the title of ‘Mum’ from a young man who had no family of his own and forcefully insisting he stay with them as long as he needed.

Draco smiled, he had never seen his mother so... Well, there wasn’t really a word for it was there? It seemed the maternal flame she had clearly been forced to douse for most of his life had exploded into an inferno as she extended the same offer to the rest of his mates who had trickled in through the morning. It was nice seeing his mother making her own progress, same as he was; learning how to break out of moulds set for them by life and one Lucius Malfoy. And if she did it by adopting sons on the wrong side of war, then who was he to complain, he considered them all his brothers, but never knew just how much he meant it; time and war and distance had no bearing on a family you chose yourself. Draco marvelled at how incredibly wrong he had been telling Potter he couldn’t have this; not twelve hours later, he took a step back and looked at the people crowded around in Greg Goyle’s hospital bed and saw his family define itself before his eyes.
'No man is a failure who has friends.' He thought wistfully.

“*Attaboy Clarence*” Draco whispered to himself with a smile as he wondered whether George Bailey felt like this when he figured it out too (fictional or not).

oOo

Chapter End Notes

as always, if you're liking this please leave some feedback, kudos or I'm open to suggestions-- if I can't fit it in here, I'll gladly write you a one-shot, just ask :)

I'm really excited to get the next chapter up:) but please excuse the sporadic posting of late; I'm working on three other unposted works; one for strictly Dramione summer loving fest, a snow white-esque Dramione and a Logan Lucky Reylo thing that my 3 am brain spat out (I don't know the ship name for Clyde/Rey is there one?) so my plate is full throwing in full-time work, a mild reading/gaming addiction and sports/music on top of that.

much love -xo Em
Hermione Granger did not do well with doctor’s orders. She hated anything restrictive, but for once in her life, she had no choice but to obey. Harry watched her like a hawk and when he wasn’t there, Ginny did the same. In a way, she was glad she had shooed Draco back to the hospital, she didn’t think she could stop herself getting snippy if she had a third person hovering over her. ‘I only fainted, I mean honestly, I’m not dying’

At least Ginny was slightly better company. Not that it hadn’t been lovely to chat about her Boyfriend and Brother in all but blood finally managing to set aside their differences (for the most part). She just missed having a little girl time.

Ginny had been all over her but knew better than to bring up the ordeal in France. For once Hermione was glad to have some small details to share. To say her friend was excited about the
progression in her relationship was an understatement, they had been in the middle of discussing Ginny’s engagement when she had let it slip and she chose to gloss over details in favour of an interrogation.

Not that she managed to get Hermione to reveal much, just enough to keep her going. Admittedly Gin’s interest in Draco was a little unsettling; but then again that was just Ginny, Hermione didn’t feel threatened by her, even if Draco was fair game on the ‘look but don’t touch’ front; Hermione was just happy she was the one to do the touching.

“Okay but ‘Mione you have to tell me how it was, I want details; did he live up to the hype?”

Well, no harm was going to come from telling the truth about that;

“There was actually no hype to live up to… he did perfectly for his first time, and the rest.”

Ginny looked scandalized and squeezed her hands so hard if she wanted feeling back any time soon she needed to explain pronto:

“You're telling me the Slytherin sex god was a virgin in disguise? You.. deflowered Malfoy? Ahaha, oh, that is just too good! No wonder he always looked so… so pinchy!”

“Gin that’s a little harsh don’t you think?”

“Oh please, that’s not how I meant it; with looks like his, not to mention Pansy hanging off his every syllable; how is that even possible? But he must have been good, or you wouldn’t be smirking like your boyfriend does.”

“Well he and Pansy played into the rumours, he regretted it later and ‘good’ is a term that just falls flat.”

“Ooh! SPILL!”

She knew anything she told Ginny would go no further, she had never really been one to kiss and tell. This was between her and Draco and it wasn’t really Ginny’s business, but if she was being honest with herself, she likely wouldn’t have found the courage to make a move if it hadn’t been for her detailed advice. She relented but still remained relatively vague.

“Fiine.”

Ginny zapped her in the ribs and she instantly picked up her enthusiasm with a giggle.

“Fine! What do you wanna hear? That the boy has a mouth ’n’ body made for sinnin’?”

She put on her best fake southern accent as she spoke, sending Ginny into a fit of giggles, it was a running joke after they watched a bunch of old movies like ‘Gone with the Wind’ and listened to the women gossiping, sometimes they’d use overly posh British and if they were being crass Australian...

“Hermione! oh my God!”

Keeping up her poor attempt at an accent she continued;

“What like that’s a huge revelation? How ’bout the fact that the last time we got up to anythin’, it was that good I cried? Or that he can still manage to be a gentleman while whisperin’ wicked things in my ear.”

Descending into sidesplitting laughter, it took a few minutes before either of them calmed down.
“Sweet Merlin! ’Mione I’m glad he’s taking care of you, it’s all I wanted for you. Sure, he’s a ferrety git sometimes, but he’s perfect for you, anyone could see it.”

“He does take care of me and sex isn’t even the half of it; We went to the British Museum on a date and could have jumped him right there in the Egyptian exhibit when he started spouting facts. I couldn’t have asked for a better partner in crime.

“Only you would be that attracted to his brain. As much as I love my brother; you couldn’t have had this with him.”

“I know Gin, I loved Ron but I could never have imagined I would be this happy, we fight and snark and tease but at the end of the day, I never have to wonder how he feels about me. He’s given me his whole heart and I’ve given him mine.”

Ginny quirked an eyebrow at her and Hermione knew she understood exactly what she meant.

They ended the conversation there, preferring to chat about things that didn’t relate to themselves in between preliminary wedding plans. Over the course of the morning, during a discussion about the guest list, she discovered Ron had broken up with Lavender Christmas day and went on to get ridiculously drunk, much to Molly’s annoyance. No one knew why he’d done it, but Hermione suspected Draco might have something to do with it.

It was good Ron was letting that relationship end, she hoped for his sake it would stick, Lavender had always been a little toxic; he needed someone to balance him; someone that wouldn’t take any of his shit, but knew when to give what he needed, someone level-headed but fierce when it mattered. She tried to think about who fit that bill… There were only a few names that crossed her mind, but if she was going to play matchmaker, he would need to deal with his house prejudice first.

oOo

At some point during the conversation Hermione fell asleep, she hadn’t really thought about the effect the healing spells might have on her at the time; she was powerful but even she had a limit, healing the effects of dark magic always took its toll without the aid of potions, she was stuck feeling the exhaustion in the aftermath. Draco’s expertise leaned more toward normal injuries, leaving his magic intact; though she supposed that was what he would be used to healing, between his abusive father, the death eaters and his love of Quidditch, it would have been an imperative skill to have.

She barely stirred when Draco slipped into bed with her. Warm, strong arms registered in her mostly unconscious mind and inexplicably she relaxed even further, the last lingering tension releasing as he held her close. It had to be night if he had returned, she’d apologise to Ginny tomorrow…Hermione drifted off as their breathing synced and slept peacefully knowing they were both safe and well.

oOo

One blissfully uneventful week later, Hermione was well and truly back on her feet (honestly it had only taken a day and a half) and woke to find herself tucked into Draco’s chest, she smiled at the fact he put up with being uncomfortable just to hold her close while she moved her hair out of his face. Little things like that warmed her heart. Voices echoed up the stairs to their room in Grimmauld place and she nudged Draco awake, knowing that it had to be time for breakfast if everyone else now sheltering in Harry’s home was up and chattering. The second he opened his eyes and saw her, he smiled lazily and pressed a kiss to her forehead. As much as she wanted to stay in bed with him, she went over to their trunks and grabbed fresh clothes for the both of them, throwing his over before getting dressed.
Walking into the kitchen, Draco and Hermione were met by not only Harry and Ginny; but Ron, Neville, Narcissa, Blaise, Theo and Goyle as well. She greeted each in turn and was only slightly caught off guard when Greg Goyle, fresh out of St. Mungos that morning, stood and rushed over to wrap her in the tightest bear hug physically possible; she returned it with equal fervour, not needing to say anything.

Things were still a little frosty with Ron once he had arrived, he hadn’t apologised but in the past week, she had caught him watching her and the rest of the snakes with a close eye. For the most part, she kept to her word despite the enforced close quarters, she avoided him when she could and was polite when she had to be; but she watched him too.

The second day after he’d arrived she walked in on a conversation he was having with Theo, the day after that he was laughing with Blaise and Goyle over breakfast and imagine her surprise when she saw him washing and drying dishes with Narcissa after dinner two nights later, making polite conversation.

The only person he couldn’t seem to bring himself to speak to was Draco and that bothered her more than it should have. She could see how much it troubled him that he wasn’t able to fix things.

Taking their places at the already packed table, they listened in to the morning’s developments, chatting and eating until the group began to disperse. Unable to leave the house until it was time to return to Hogwarts, each sought things to occupy themselves with, Narcissa and Neville had taken to tending the small greenhouse; Theo and Blaise played board games until they dreamed of chess pieces; Harry and Ron naturally went to work using the connected Floo; Ginny and Goyle had become fast friends and had amazed everyone with their combined baking talents, no one questioned the hobby with their mouths full… Hermione and Draco made damn good use of the Black Library. All things considered, they were all managing to get along.

The day dragged on and Hermione was curled up on a couch in the living room with Draco resting his head in her lap as she read aloud, her copy of The Hobbit held in one hand while she carded her fingers through his hair. there had been no reason to look up, but she flicked her eyes over the room as she turned the page, She screeched to a halt when she noticed Ron standing in the doorway watching them. Draco, unable to see from where he was, looked up at her with a confused expression before lifting his head and seeing the explanation for himself.

He sat up quickly and gazed coolly in Ron’s direction. Hermione was glad he was able to keep himself in control, even if she was having a harder time of it herself.

Ron looked nervous and when he spoke it sounded through.

“D-do you mind if I s-sit?”

She eyed him warily, unsure where this conversation might be headed

“Sure, have a seat; but if you have nothing nice to say please keep it to yourself.”

Ron looked ashamed and she braced herself for whatever he was about to say.

“Actually ’Mione I wanted to apologise; I don’t know why it’s taken me this long, I have no excuse for that… I think I was just so jealous I couldn’t see how much I hurt you, both of you. It was wrong of me to say the things I did and I’m sorry I forced your hand, I was a real prick about it. But if you have it in your heart to give me a second chance, I’d really like to make it up to you, both of you… And Malfoy, I really ought to thank you, you didn’t have to try and set me straight…Merlin, I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I should have listened to you.”
“Um, you’re welcome Weasley.”

“Well, it might be a bit late, but I’m trying hard to take your advice, I’ve been getting to know everyone and they’ve all been so nice, then seeing you two together, hearing about you going off to rescue him, getting Goyle out as well…Witnessing first-hand how much you snakes really care for one another… It was the wakeup call I needed. I should have seen that you and your lot weren’t what I assumed sooner, but I was blinded by hate and, pride and pain; so, I took it out on you and I wish I could take it all back I really do…”

She decided now might be the time to offer her friend a proper olive branch, before he said too much and ruined a perfectly good apology.

“Some friend I’d be if I didn’t give you a second chance. Doesn’t mean I’m not still hurt by it, it’ll take some getting over and you’ll need to accept that you’ll have to be patient; but you’ve made a start and that’s all I wanted.”

“Thanks Hermione, I appreciate it. I can’t promise he and I will be the best of mates, but if he makes you happy I can learn to get along with him, for your sake at least. I should have done it from the start, but it really puts things in perspective when your best friend almost gets herself killed on some rescue mission and you never got the chance to make things right.”

She stood and wrapped a tentative arm around Ron’s shoulders. Holding back a tear or two when he reciprocated with the lightest of hugs. She let go and returned to her place beside Draco, watching Ron leave the room with a lighter heart that she had started the day with.

The moment he was down the hall, she buried her face in Draco’s shoulder and cried. He ran a hand over her hair and rubbed small circles between her shoulder blades, his touch soothing. A few minutes later she looked up at him with bleary eyes, taking in his confused expression. She almost laughed when he said exactly what she was thinking;

“Did that just happen?”

“Yeah, need me to pinch you?”

She sniffled as she spoke, offering him a small smile to let him know she was alright. She had known to expect Ron to come around eventually, but the effect it had on her was something she hadn’t counted on.

With her parents gone, her friends were all she had left and the prospect of losing one of them was something that had weighed heavily on her. You never really give up on your family, she was telling the truth when she said it would take time to get over it, but she wasn’t lying when she offered him a chance. Would she be where she was today if she hadn’t been willing to forgive?

Draco attempted to give her space to process Ron’s apology, she wasn’t having a bar of it and sat him back down beside her, instead of internalizing her thoughts she voiced them aloud and listened to his in turn. She wasn’t the only one feeling strange after their conversation with Ron.

By the time they had to rejoin the small society Harry was hiding in his home for dinner, the atmosphere between them was far less tense and the relief palpable. She didn’t actively avoid looking at Ron, the change was that quick; she no longer felt surreptitiously judged for laughing and joking with her boyfriend and his fellow Slytherins. She still felt his eyes on her and she knew Draco had noticed it as well, placing a hand on his knee under the table in an attempt to calm his jealous, protective side, he covered her hand with his and seemed to relax a bit. she could only imagine how he must be feeling, knowing Ron still loved her as more than a friend; she found it awkward but
Draco had to deal with the fact someone was waiting around for him to mess up to make the most of the opportunity if one presented itself. They hadn’t really had time to discuss things, but she was wise enough to know that if the shoe was on the other foot; she would be close to tearing that girl’s eyes out if she so much as glanced at Draco the wrong way.

His jaw tightened and even though she was sympathetic, the expression was incredibly hot. Not caring who was looking she scooted closer, leaning into him and resting her head on his shoulder; as if to say, ‘this one is mine and I am his.’ it was nothing less than the truth. Though Narcissa’s brief glare did manage to unsettle her a little.

She had been making a point of spending time with the Malfoy matriarch and though Narcissa was surprisingly warm and funny and an excellent conversationalist, she was rather big on tradition; apparently, she had been rather concerned with Hermione kissing her son or doing much of anything, beyond holding hands before they were engaged. Oddly enough it wasn’t Hermione she blamed for it; she had almost spat out her tea when Narcissa Malfoy openly suggested that if her mooncalf of a son wanted to ‘get any’ he needed to ‘get a ring.’

Hermione had smiled knowingly into her tea and nodded her head, trying her hardest not to burst out laughing at the thought of what they had been up to in the study the day before.

oOo

As the evening drew to a close and with Narcissa in the house, blissfully unaware; Hermione and Draco resorted to sneaking into one or the others room once the house had fallen silent; unfortunately, there had been more than a few close calls with all the unpredictable sleeping patterns, bathroom trips and those seeking water in the middle of the night. Incidents no charm could prevent. The only person to actually witness said sneaking was Blaise; he simply leered at Draco and timed a pelvic thrust with a double thumbs up that saw Draco entering her room barely containing his hysterics.

The only thing they had to contend with after that, were his constant innuendos and winking. It was no surprise to their schoolmates, but he had no shame doing it in front of Narcissa or Molly when she had dropped in to make sure they were all well looked after. After two days Draco switched his teacup to one of Zonko’s nose biting variety, leaving a note in the bottom of the cup to ‘cut it out or worse would follow’. It was childish but at least everyone got a laugh out of it.

Ginny and Harry naturally suspected their shenanigans but wouldn’t tell a soul, under threat of her mother being informed of their own sneaky habits.

Feeling exhausted and a little emotionally drained, Hermione craved a decent night’s sleep…After a while she realised she was unable to drift off without Draco next to her; naturally, her mind supplied a more practical way of settling into sleep and as she waited for him in the dark she slipped a hand between her thighs. she wasn’t surprised to note that she was already a little slick.

She slipped out of her pyjama pants and spread her legs; massaging her clit with slow movements she didn’t notice Draco had arrived or that he had stayed in the shadows watching her. She bit back a small moan as she slipped two fingers inside her entrance, but found it still wasn’t quite as satisfying as it once was. She added a third and that helped somewhat. Pumping them in and out of her cunt, with what she considered frankly obscene sounds following each movement, she picked up her pace. Panting heavily, she did her best to keep quiet as she bucked her hips against her own hand; that apparently was the last shred of Draco’s restraint.

He strode over and pulled her hand away. His mouth was on her in an instant, drinking down her arousal and turning her into a writhing mess as he slipped his fingers inside her sopping pussy and
sucked hard on her clit. She attempted to muffle her involuntary moan with her hand, but it honestly didn’t make much difference.

Trying her hardest to keep quiet she tangled her fingers in Draco’s inexplicably soft hair and ground her hips against his face. She felt the light vibration of his approving hum, his spare hand now anchoring her down as he pressed against her g-spot. She could tell she was going to come hard, the build-up was intense and she felt so sensitive. She could feel the pressure of her inclement orgasm increase and though it was a little foreign she ignored it.

Then, the oddest sensation when she finally came, almost like she needed to pee, and everything felt soaked, but it was so intense she nearly screamed with the feel of it. The muscles in her legs still shaking as she came down from her high, she buried her face in her hands as she tried to cope with the embarrassment of her assumption. The sheets were wet, and she was so shocked she found herself holding back tears.

It took seconds for Draco to notice she was upset about something and he was level with her in an instant. Pulling her hands away, he looked down at her with concern. Quickly realizing the problem, he explained what had happened and reassured her (she’d always thought squirting was a myth, evidently not) until she offered her acceptance by sealing her mouth to his in a messy kiss, she could taste herself on him as her tongue danced around his and he bit her lip in response. She fucking loved this man.

Pulling him down on top of her, she worked him free of his pants, he was already hard and straining against the fabric. She was so wet, he slid in with ease, filling her completely with one smooth motion. He fucked her slow and deep, whispering strangely sweet yet filthy encouragements as she met each thrust until she snapped like a taut bowstring, coming on his cock with a stifled moan caught by his hand over her mouth. He followed quickly behind her, burying his face in the crook of her shoulder, biting down a little when he released into her.

While he quietly applied the appropriate spells to clean up, she returned from the bathroom with a towel and fresh shirt in hand. Safely tucked into his chest as he whispered sweet nothings to her, funnily enough, she felt far more tired than she had before; drifting off she mumbled something between consciousness and sleep that repeated in Draco’s head for months after;

“You're it for me.”

oOo

Chapter End Notes

chapter edited because i missed one little slash when putting in italics.

Next update will be early this week.

As always I adore hearing from you so please feel free to leave comments suggestions, feedback or a kudos. I genuinely get excited when I see a notification in my inbox- I'm such a sap I know...

side note: In case it bothers anyone, I'd also like to say I am not poking fun at accents here- that little bit is something that my high school mates and I used to do whenever we'd engage in a bit of gossip- it came about after a bunch of Aussie gals spent a
weekend watching westerns and Downton Abbey and almost died laughing at the many attempts to mimic. It isn't meant to be rude, it's just a little bit of my life I wanted to include.

till next time
xo Em
Chapter 31

Chapter Summary

so, Bit of a slow update but we're back on track with Draco's pov

Chapter Notes

they're heading back to Hogwarts, pins have been set up and we are getting into the third act :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

Draco couldn’t believe how much things could change in a week. Getting ready to head back to Hogwarts, he was in a perpetual state of surprise as his housemates began to get on with Potter and Weasley. It was such a significant shift, he wondered if the fears he had held over finding a job after school were null. Surely if they could manage to overcome their misgivings, others might be convinced to do the same.

Sure, it wasn’t going to be easy, there were always going to be those who couldn’t accept them, but at least the jobs market for genuinely reformed death eaters might improve if enough minds could be changed. He wondered if there would be those who would claim his seeking employment might indicate a hidden agenda, he almost laughed at the thought ‘No, it would be because I don’t want to be a trust fund kid who never worked hard for anything in his entire life.’

It was strange to see such acceptance on the part of the two most stubborn Gryffindors. Befriending the others had taken time and effort, but at least they had kept open minds. Harry had only done so out of respect for Hermione but was genuinely coming around and Weasel was much the same, if belated; they were still wary but there was barely a hint of insincerity. Much like their housemates had done, Harry and Ron were coming to terms with the fact that what they had thought of the Slytherins had been a little biased.

They had also come to see that perhaps treating an entire house as though they were evil and untrustworthy might not inspire the warmest of feelings in return. Draco and his housemates had seen far too much torment simply for wearing green; and who wouldn’t lash out when you’re stereotyped from such a young age; booed for simply being in the ‘wrong house’

With all that on his mind, as well as what was going on with his father and Bellatrix; Draco’s thoughts on career had somewhat shifted since Christmas. He wasn’t about to let Death Eaters roam free, he had a wand and a conscience, his sense of duty prevailing. He hadn’t told Hermione yet, but he had a feeling she would more than understand him wanting to join the Aurors; he was willing to put up with the sideways looks, snide comments, turned backs and cold shoulders so long as he was doing the right thing; especially if it meant being someone his housemates could trust in that department in the aftermath of the war. Perhaps that was his only secondary agenda.
He knew it was dangerous work, missions like the chateau would be frequent, but he couldn’t just stand by and let someone else clean up a mess he had helped make. If he could contribute to fixing things, perhaps he could not only redeem his name but properly atone for some of his sins.

He might have to leave for training, but if he made the decision he wasn’t going to leave Hermione wondering where she fit into the picture. He knew she had her own dreams and he was certain that his affections were clear to her; but after hearing her mumble in her sleep that he was it for her, he knew that the same was true for him, he was never going to want anyone else. Her name might as well have been carved into his bones at this point. His mother had been right. They weren’t ready yet but there were other ways of making promises to one another; he just hadn’t considered those pureblood customs.

He didn’t have anything to prove to her, his insecurities reduced to flickers in the past week alone rather than the raging inferno they had been before. But he wanted to prove himself to everyone else; that lingered as he wanted to be someone that she could be proud to be with in public, someone that didn’t leave people staring after her with hate and questions burning in their eyes. It wasn’t about being good enough in an insecure kind of way, he wanted to feel proud of himself, be able to hold his own head high and tell their kids that he found a way to rise above his past and be someone who left a good legacy in his wake.

And right at that moment, the best chance he thought he had of waking that path was to join the Auror department and put people like his father back in Azkaban where they belonged. He’d realised that the peaceful life he wanted to live didn’t come without dirty work, and if he was living peacefully was he really just ignoring the fact that there wasn’t true peace among Wizards? Peace could wait, he needed to earn it first.

Draco had spent their last afternoon away from Hogwarts worried out of his mind. A team of Aurors would be escorting Hermione, Ginny, Neville, Luna, Blaise, Theo, Greg (who had decided that facing schoolwork was preferable to death eaters) and himself to the train. But what the Aurors failed to mention was that they were also live bait. He had overheard them the afternoon before, hoping that putting so many desired targets in one place might draw out the death eaters.

It was the dumbest idea he had ever heard. But he was still worried.

At least he knew his mother would be in safe hands, she had announced that she intended to accept the hospitality of Molly and Arthur Weasley, it came as a shock to most of the household, but was perfectly logical when he thought about it. It seemed in the past week she had made her own amends and found a new friend in the fiery witch not to mention a healthy respect and appreciation for her abilities with magic and as a mother. Narcissa Malfoy had spent the better part of the morning excitedly telling him that Molly had agreed to reveal a few of her secrets and he was glad to see his mother animated and happy.

The Ministry really had no idea how to handle the situation and Draco had hoped that the screaming match his mother had with the Minister might change that. When Narcissa Malfoy wanted something, she didn’t always go about it quietly, and not having to consider Lucius’s thoughts on matters meant that she was free to be the firecracker of a woman Draco had never had the pleasure of knowing until recently. But unfortunately, yelling couldn’t fix the incompetence of a department. Why he wanted to join it he had no idea.

The next morning, they all headed to the station with butterflies in their stomachs and barely contained jitters. After a quick final chat with his mother before she disappeared into the floo, he was implored once more to make sure Hermione was aware of his intentions in a more material way, he
had every intention of talking it over with his girlfriend first that was for damn sure but should it go well, he wondered if he might be able to visit his mother through the term to discuss making arrangements around the fact her parents could not be part of forming the contract. It was something he would have to ask McGonagall about.

He didn’t realise until he was on the train and half way to Hogwarts that there didn’t need to be a blasted contract or any of that formal bullshit his father had droned on about when teaching him the supposed importance of pureblood traditions. Funny how those types of things lingered unused in one’s head.

There were a few small customs he wanted to keep, simply because they had nothing to do with being pureblood but because they had everything to do with courting properly by any wizarding standard; but he would certainly be discussing them with Hermione beforehand; mostly to be certain it was what she wanted and that she was aware of what it meant.

Draco was almost startled when Hermione returned to their compartment in the middle of his wondering, he felt like he’d had a hand in the biscuit tin without permission. He relaxed after a second or two and held out his arms to beckon her over. He knew she’d been worried too and was glad to share in her relief. The others had all dispersed across the train settling in for the journey, but she had been dealing with a couple of quarrelling first years, leaving him to his thoughts for a while thus why he’d been startled out of them.

As she settled against him, he could feel her need to say something radiating into the atmosphere, he just had to wait for her to tell him (he’d been waiting for her to work up to it for a few days now and his curiosity was piqued).

“Draco, do you think they’ll try to invade Hogwarts again?”

“I doubt it, I mean they only managed to get in the first time because I let them in and the second time Voldemort had the elder wand.”

“That’s a fair point. I just don’t know if I feel safe going back knowing that there are kids there that support what is going on. What if one of them is placed in the same position you were? I mean I know you destroyed the vanishing cabinet but there are other ways. It’s not like we’d have a way of knowing, we aren’t in our dorms anymore and we have no insight into Hufflepuff or Ravenclaw.”

“Maybe we could ask McGonagall to enlist the portraits and ghosts to keep a closer eye on things?”

“It’s a start, but if the war taught me anything it was to be prepared. We have to be sure that if they get into the castle we have a plan. We can’t be caught short like last time; they’re ‘recruiting’ purebloods which puts a huge target on Slytherin, but the fact they mentioned wanting to take the Weasleys, means they aren’t above taking those they consider blood traitors. If they want to bolster their numbers, it would make sense for them to infiltrate and systematically work their way through the castle. We know they have the means and numbers to launch an offensive, followers left over from the war, unmarked and just waiting for orders. In times of emergency, students are told to gather in either the great hall or to stay in their dormitories; meaning the Aurors had the right idea about live bait, just the wrong place.”

“So how do we evacuate the school and where do we send that many children?”

“That’s the part I haven’t figured out yet. There are passages and tunnels, but there won’t be time to get everyone there safely, the floo is too slow; only small groups can get through at a time, apparition isn’t an option...
“What about portkeys? They’re practically untraceable and single use. We make a portkey for every student; something small like your DA coin…Yes, I know, How on earth?… Inquisitorial squad, remember? Anyway; we stagger them to transport students by year, youngest to oldest and modify the activation so that the evacuation can only be triggered by the Headmistress or a head of house in her stead.”

“That… might actually work! Draco, that’s brilliant.”

“Well, I mean if they can do it for the World Cup, why not use it as a means of mass evacuation. If the death eaters or anyone else manages to get inside, we’ll have minutes to get everyone to safety, this is instant and simple and depending on what we use, we can enchant them, so they can’t be taken off or lost. Even when there’s no imminent threat it would be handy to have; I don’t know why someone didn’t think of it sooner… But where do we send them? it would have to be somewhere secure, well warded, large enough to fit the student body, have spare beds available until arrangements can be made…We can’t send them to the Ministry, or St Mungos they’d be overwhelmed and it’s too obvious; perhaps we could arrange to send half the students to Beauxbatons and half to Durmstrang? Set it up as an interschool protocol where if say Beauxbatons is attacked, they could evacuate to either of the other wizarding schools or both if need be. What do you think?”

“I think we need to speak to McGonagall as soon as we get off the train and start working on this. we’ll need to go the library, of course, do some research; see if we can’t figure out a way to set them off at the same time but stagger arrival after the fact… I’m sure if we put our heads together and enlist a few other minds, we can crack this in no time and have portkeys out quicker than you can say cauldron cakes.”

“You're sure it’s a good idea? I mean I might have thought of it but even I think it might be overkill. Not that there’s anything wrong with being prepared but I would be worried that people might assume the issue is bigger than what it is; the last thing we need to cause more fear and distrust.”

“I see where you’re coming from, but I think with a few minor tweaks it’s still an excellent plan, we just have to get permission to make the portkeys. Mum always used to say that a stitch in time saves nine, we just have to hope people see it the same way; the schools are our testing ground, we just explain to the parents that this is precautionary, like a doing a fire drill.”

“Fire drill? That sounds menacing”

“Oh, no; Something muggle schools do, they fake an emergency and practice evacuating, so when it really happens people know what to do.”

“So basically, this would be our equivalent?”

“Exactly; and if it’s a success it won’t just benefit Hogwarts students, it could be used by multiple agencies outside the school system; Wizards might practice divination, but that hasn’t prevented tragedies occurring in the past. It wouldn’t be hard to make it part of attending large events, maybe incorporate it into Ministry attire should the building ever need to be evacuated… You could even suggest it to MACUSA and Ilvermorny!”

“You really think so?”

“Well, of course; it’s a great idea. You said yourself that you couldn’t believe no one had thought of it before. This could help a lot of people.”

“I had something else on my mind though… I know you might think I’m a bit mad for suggesting this
and we’ve spoken about it quite a few times in the past, but after the last week I think after we graduate I’d be of more use in a different department of the Ministry.”

He wasn’t even the slightest bit surprised she had been on the same wavelength it happened so often since they had become friends; it no longer came as a shock. He’d told her many times she’d be wasted in the Magical Creatures sector and Magical law was easy enough to transition into when you wanted a desk job.

He was incredibly glad she was talking to him about it, they’d talked at length about what they wanted to do after school, but he wondered if perhaps the reason she was nervous about changing her mind was due to the change in their relationship. Evidently, that was not the case.

She did look more than a little confused when he bag to laugh about it though.

“Sweetheart, you’ll make a fine Auror.”

“I know I’d be good at it, plenty of experience and all that, it’s just it’s not what I originally saw myself doing, you know?”

“I think I might know better than anyone. I’m sorry I laughed love, but I was thinking of doing the same thing.”

It was her turn to look surprised. She was, of course, encouraging and understanding of his reasons; it was good to have a second opinion and it was an added bonus they could go through training together if they followed through. She was already rather pleased by that and he couldn’t help but think it would take the pressure off if they weren’t separated; that was the last thing he had wanted and things were just tying themselves up neatly it seemed.

“You know you’re going to have to deal with Harry and Ron on a daily basis?”

“Yeah, I know, but it seems Potter and I can have a civil conversation, and maybe being around Weasley more will help defrost things.”

“Not to mention I’ll be around to keep an eye on the lot of you.”

He planted a kiss on the crown of her head and tried not to jostle her as he laughed. she smiled up at him knowing that he was most certainly envisioning the trouble he might end up in under her watchful eye.

“So, when we graduate are you going to put in an application or are you going to speak to the minister?”

“Application of course! and I’ll be submitting it under an alias. It wouldn’t be fair to get in on my name alone. They can deal with the fact I lied later.”

“Smart, I’d steal that idea if I could be sure they wouldn’t try to kill me on sight if I managed to get an interview.”

All of a sudden, her expression changed and he felt guilt begin to creep in. that subtle reminder of the difference between them enough to sober the jovial mood. But as always, she managed to surprise him.

“It sucks that you can’t do the same Draco! I mean I know that you don’t deserve to be judged, you’ve changed and for the better but its just a constant battle for you and I’m just sorry you have to deal with that.”
“Hey, it’s not your fault, I made my choices I get to live with them.”

“But it shouldn’t have such a bearing on your future!”

“As long as it doesn’t have a bearing on our future I really don’t care.”

He felt her stiffen slightly in his hold and he figured he must have said something wrong (he hoped he didn’t). He couldn’t see her expression and the same moment she went to turn around, he leant down and with a sickening crack his nose connected with the side of her head.

He managed to internalise a string of curses, but after sparing a moment to collect himself, noted he wasn’t bleeding and it had sounded worse than it was.

Pinching the bridge of his nose, she was looking at him with an expression he really couldn’t quite place. Something between determination and adoration

He didn’t see why it would shock her that he expressed the fact he thought they had a future, but he figured it would be better to wait for an explanation rather than assume she may have taken it to mean something else. His instinct proved right.

“You just said you don’t care! Draco you don’t care! Ok, that came out wrong… you really, honest to god don’t care what people say about us?”

“I guess not… You’re here, you’ve more than proven you’ll always be here, what need is there for doubt? We got through Potter and Weasley ok and I guess that seemed to me to be the hardest part…”

It was something they hadn’t really spoken about in detail, he had mentioned it once or twice in passing but they had never really sat down and had a conversation about the reality of their relationship and how it might be affected when word got out, now that it was beginning to happen he was glad to have made his thoughts known.

And the news was bound to spread. With people like Rita Skeeter looking for a scoop; he supposed now was as good a time as any to talk about the fact that they would need to play a very careful and manipulative long game to ensure that she wasn’t dragged through the press for the supposed crime of loving him. He didn’t like the idea of emulating his father’s methods of controlling the media, but he would rather put up with guilt over bending his morals than having to avoid the drivel outlets like the prophet would produce.

But it seemed once again she was on his wavelength, every concern he raised she managed to bat away with ease; Skeeter… Put her back in the jar; the Ministry… threaten them with a discrimination suit; the Aurors… work hard and what can they honestly do to you; society in general… Who gives a fuck what society thinks.

As long as he had her, he didn’t much care about anything else.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

31 chapters in and i am still blown away by the hits, kudos, comments and feedback
please keep it coming because it continues to motivate and inspire me
much love xo Em
Chapter 32

Chapter Summary

hermione's pov- there's a bit of a time jumping which covers about two months of the second term post Draco's kidnap

Chapter Notes

okay, lovely people, I'm back and refreshed. I took a little break from posting this one while I worked my butt off to get ahead. I came off a two-week slump with about 5 chapters written and mostly edited and about another 10 planned and in progress.

So, I apologise for the wait, but now I can space out chapters every few days and not feel as stressed - I had a lot of ideas I just needed to write out all at once (but a bit of writer's block was preventing me from wording the vision). It was much easier to take a quick break from posting to just get it all down and separate into ch's later and my anxiety has been thanking me for it.

so here it is, with a little lemon in there for fun among the filling (that sounds wrong but I swear I do not mean it that way). I hope the time jumps don't mess with you too much - they cover the first half of the second school term after Christmas (however, next chapter will have a very adorable valentines scene I hope you all love which will be recounted by Draco as a reflection/insight on the past two months from his point of view)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

Being back at Hogwarts had changed the landscape of Hermione’s emotions considerably, she felt safer, more self-assured and was happy to be back in the routine of things after so much uncertainty. In the month that passed after Christmas, she slowly let herself relax.

The holidays felt like they’d gone on for a year and the first term was practically an eon considering all that had happened. But she wasn’t concerned with reflection; she was living for every small, present moment she could. She had kept her fears locked away and the prospect of losing someone she loved, the way she almost lost Draco had rocked her to her core, not that she let it show. Now on the other side of Christmas and out of Grimmauld place, she decided there was no reason to hide what they had when it had almost been lost.

She continued to seek Draco out through the day, just like she had before; only now she’d greet him with a kiss, rather than a look he didn’t know meant longing. It did them both good to be a normal couple, unconcerned with thoughts and opinions held by others, who really had no say in the matter.

She’d taken up attending Quidditch training and matches, he’d work on homework with her in the evenings, sit with her in the library and the list went on… It was as though the need to be separate
had disappeared and while it might have sounded strange, they needed it. As time passed they slowly began to let go, just a little, as fear was replaced with vigilance they allowed themselves time to cope with the aftermath of shared trauma.

There had also been a few other developments since returning for the second term; like visiting his mother in Hogsmeade for a butterbeer or a firewhiskey every Friday. Very un-Malfoy like if you asked her but then again… It made little difference, she found the matriarch great company. She wondered why McGonagall had agreed to it and wondered if Narcissa had a hand in convincing her.

She and Narcissa would sit in the three broomsticks for hours and chat about magic, potions, sometimes baking or the latest thing Narcissa had picked up from Molly. They kept up the comradery found in their rescue and while that time had been brief, she was glad to let yet another person into her heart she had perhaps judged too hastily.

Narcissa had taken to the Weasley family incredibly well; Bill and Fleur were apparently indebted to her after she managed to soothe a particularly fussy Victoire, she had a knack for knitting no one could have known she possessed (Hermione was keeping her idea of knitting a sweater -a la Molly’s tradition- for Draco secret) and when Charlie had dropped in for a visit he found himself a fellow dragon enthusiast; Hermione discovered how Draco had really ended up with his name, despite the constellation tradition.

Molly and Arthur found common ground with her too and she supposed that in some instances familiarity did not breed contempt, in fact rather the opposite as they all learned to set aside their differences and see each other as people, not sides.

There had also been one or two rather embarrassing conversations about fashion… Meaning Narcissa had not so subtly asked when they could go looking at wedding dresses. Mercifully she backed off when she noticed how pink Hermione had turned; that sparked a whole new dynamic she hadn’t expected.

Over the course of a few meetings, Narcissa had taken on an air of neutrality giving insightful observations and motherly advice about her relationship with Draco. There were a number of things Hermione wished she could talk about with her mother and Narcissa kindly stepped in as someone she could talk to, who understood the lingering anxieties and questions that came with a relationship as serious as theirs at such a young age.

She seamlessly balanced the conflict of interest, no longer making awkward offhanded comments about rings or wedding planning; rather allowing Hermione to pursue understanding and knowledge from someone who had, at one time been in a similar situation. After all, if anyone could understand how it felt to worry about the pace of a relationship it was Narcissa. It was a well-known fact she had married Lucius right after graduation.

No one knew she had been terrified to go through with it. She’d never told a soul until she admitted it to Hermione.

The night Narcissa opened up about her early relationship with Lucius, she ordered a bottle of firewhiskey and the two of them downed the bottle as Narcissa recounted how they came to fall in love. It was rather a bittersweet story now, but at the end of it, she felt she could understand Narcissa better.

Thankfully that conversation had been on a Friday night, they talked and cried and laughed and talked some more before both retired expecting raging hangovers in the morning. Hermione had always been under the impression that a potential mother in law would be stern and unfriendly toward their son’s love interest; she liked that she had a friend in Narcissa; and being able to see her
as a confidante, someone she could trust with things she would only ever have admitted to her mother, was more than she ever could have asked for in extended family.

And after so many discussions, she knew that was exactly where things were heading… It scared her far less than it had before.

Whenever she did meet with Narcissa, Draco usually occupied himself someway or other and eventually she figured out her bonding with his mother was his intent. So, she’d come back to their dorm sometimes far tipsier that she wanted to admit, and tell him how it had gone. She could tell it made him immensely happy to know they got on well (even though he thought he hid it well) and she, in turn, wondered if she was the subject of his increasingly frequent meetings with his mother.

How she found the time was baffling, though she supposed there was little else to do when hiding from your husband and a band of crazed fanatics hell-bent on reviving Voldemort’s plan. Hogsmeade was practically an annexe of Hogsmeade and better protected than it used to be, so it made sense Narcissa felt comfortable visiting them there. It wasn’t exactly normal for students but then again, it wasn’t ‘normal’ for there to be eighth-year students attending either.

As the term continued to progress, things on the neo-death eater front had been eerily quiet. It had been almost two months with no threatening letters, no kidnappings (that they were aware of); it was the only thing keeping her on edge, but with the school eventually coming around and approving Draco’s portkey idea and the fact that a few extras had been set aside and constructed to act as a secondary, emergency escapes for the eighth years; she was able to sleep better at night.

It hadn’t been difficult to enlist the assistance of the house elves (and for once she believed them when they said they wanted to help), they spent weeks turning school uniforms (and pyjamas) into portkeys. Students who were old enough to go to Hogsmeade in casual clothing were given Hogwarts pins, to be worn at all times, something McGonagall had come up with as a solution to the plainclothes problem.

She hadn’t heard much from Harry or Ron since returning to Hogwarts; but after receiving a long explanation out of the blue, she had been right in suspecting their training had become far more rigorous in an attempt to fast-track them into the department as fully fledged Aurors.

Harry and Ron had both been partnered with senior Aurors and it became clear to her from the wording of Harry’s letter, that the Ministry was now doing everything it could to keep them away from anything that even hinted at death eaters. Someone among the higher-ups was playing the same game as before, manipulating politics to serve the agenda of their master… Or mistress in the form of a Horcrux in this case.

She had to wonder what they were trying to hide this time around; their debrief had included sharing information regarding plans, but they’d heard nothing about plans being carried out.

What worried her most was that she planned on going into a department so easily manipulated for all its ‘training’. It was something she had discussed at length with Draco, who shared her fears; however, they both came to agree that if they completed their training, no manipulation would be tolerated, even if it meant bending the rules. Times like these, it was wise to have a somewhat flexible sense of morality and a strong sense of justice.

Regardless of the underlying turmoil, things seemed to settle back into a state of normal (which was really a mass state of denial). After spending every day together cooped up in Grimmauld place they still managed to get along fine. They shared lunch breaks, kept regular study dates and spent
weekends hanging out; either in Hogsmeade, the head’s common room or in the room of requirement; sometimes chatting until all hours, playing games and enjoying not having to think about the world outside the castle… other times, making merry and drinking until they couldn’t see straight, spending the night before heading back to their own dorms the following morning.

Hermione wondered if perhaps there was an underlying need for safety in numbers, with the war so fresh in their minds, it made sense. However, there was one positive; the goal of the death eaters in fostering hatred and fear seemed to have to opposite effect as time passed and they grew closer, shedding the old ways of thinking to stand together. The bonds between former antagonists and enemies were now stronger than ever and she spoke for everyone in saying that she would trust any and all of them, with no small amount of faith and confidence.

Another fact about the new term was that nothing between Draco and herself had changed. They’d bicker and debate like always, the dynamic never shifted despite the events over Christmas break, the only real change was that these days when the ‘discussion’ got heated it was a different kind altogether. Not the burning hatred they had both tried so hard to foster in their youth, but fire of a different kind. Now that they’d gained knowledge, gotten used to and learned one another, it no longer felt like it had a specific, somewhat clinical, educational purpose and more like it was driven by pure need as it should be.

Then there was the fact that she had picked up the habit of going down to the pitch to watch Quidditch training. He’d mentioned once that she spent far too much time in the stale castle air and had dragged her flying on a rare fine Scottish afternoon.

It was the first time she’d ever felt comfortable on a broom and since then she’d made a point of flying with him after training ended, slowly she got used to it and she often found herself looking forward to it. Then there was the fact that the timing worked out perfectly for a decent snog under the stands or more when they came down…

She would be lying if she denied that his uniform did ‘things’ to her;

Which brought her to the other term development;

The other surefire way to get her heart racing since returning after the break was discovering new places to…Well, you know. Evidently, news of her relationship with Draco had reached faculty ears and they returned to dorms that were warded to separate them should they try anything.

That had been a rather delightful thing to find out, considering it hadn’t worked when they just slept together in the same bed. It had to be a complicated bit of spellwork for Draco to end up starkers in the common room when the mood struck. They’d tested each room and found that after entering through the portrait, if they tried anything more than hugging or kissing, one or the other would be sent to another room within the dorm. The warding in the common room had sent them to their individual bedrooms like naughty children put in time out. It was frustrating to say the least, so they had to get creative; she had been the one to suggest that going outside their common room would be amenable.

So, when the room of requirement wasn’t in use (because somehow in the wake of the war everyone knew where to find it), they would seek out an empty classroom, an alcove; one time they’d made use of the empty Slytherin shower block after Quidditch training. Merlin’s beard, she thought they were going to be caught for sure when they’d heard footsteps returning to the locker room; she’d clapped a hand over her mouth while he continued to go down on her, making sure no sound escaped until the footsteps faded.
Another time, they’d made use of subjects no longer taught and found a secluded spot in the library. Not that they were particularly fond of exhibitionism (well perhaps they were now), but as she had aptly put it at the time; needs must.

And what a need it was. He’d grown bolder over the past couple of months, (so had she) more self-assured and confident… She was almost annoyed by it for once, considering he had teased her all day. Vanishing her underwear from across the great hall over breakfast, only to do the same to her bra when he saw her next in transfiguration. She’d thought about running back to their dorm and grabbing a new set to spite him but considering that she had retaliated, and he was currently down his boxers, she figured it would be far more fun to see where it went.

Later that afternoon, she sat beside him in Arithmancy and realised what the point had been (though removing her bra had been wholly unnecessary). Vector preferred an open style classroom and if you sat in her periphery you could get away with just about anything so long as you didn’t draw attention to yourself. Thankfully the desks were old fashioned and had modesty panels so no one across from them would know what was going on either.

Really, she should have guessed what she was in for when she took her seat. A quarter of the way through the lecture she felt his fingers brush her outer thigh, moments later he ran his hand down her skirt to the hem and pulled it up just enough. She caught him glance at her and nodded before they both returned to their notes, his touch so light she almost couldn’t feel it as he worked his way up to where she wanted him most.

Her mind decided that focusing on two things at once was too much, especially when one of those things was going to lead her to bliss by his hand; however, there was time for her to think that even when he was doing something so ridiculously inappropriate, he was thoughtful; he’d chosen a class he knew she was weeks ahead in to fool around.

Now, she hadn’t really considered exhibitionism something she might be in to, but honestly, it didn’t make the experience any less of a rush. Thankfully it was a textbook type lesson and Vector usually marked or worked on her next class while they went about their work, as long as she kept her expressions in check and stayed silent they wouldn’t draw attention to themselves.

It was a struggle. By now he knew exactly what she liked, how to bring her to ruin and it was almost unfair. She was most definitely getting him back for it at some point. He was so blasé about it and she was stuck in her seat, red-faced and trying her best not to shift as he changed what he was doing, bringing her closer with a warm tension that built in her lower abdomen. When she finally let go, she had to stop herself jerking in her seat and the little gasp she had let out was unfortunately just enough to cause Vector to look up. She’d had a plan ready since he’d lifted her skirt up. Raising her hand, she waited for Vector to acknowledge as she tried not to think about the fact he had run his fingers through her slick folds and had traced the seam of his lips to taste her, all before Vector had looked up;

“Yes, Miss Granger?”

“May I go to the bathroom?”

“Certainly, I’ll write you a pass, just a moment.”

True to her word, a couple of seconds later, her pass floated over her desk. She snatched it out of the air and made a point of making it obvious she was taking her bag with her. Vector would most likely catch that gesture and assume it’s meaning.

Walking quickly out of class, she headed for the girls bathroom and once inside made a beeline for
the sink and splashed water on her face in an attempt to reduce the redness of her blush and the heat in her cheeks. She was a little surprised she had done something so risqué, in class no less, but she wasn’t put off by it. She had the whole prim and proper visage perfected but beneath it, she could be just as devious and filthy as the best of them; it wasn’t like she hadn’t caught others experimenting in similar ways and even though it had grossed her out completely at the time, the idea had lingered.

Yet another example of Ginny being correct about compatibility issues; her short-lived relationship with Ron would never have inspired such want, even if it had worked out. He had been fine with snogging Lavender in public, but anything more than a handhold with her (bar their first kiss) was just off the table, not even up for discussion really. Draco, on the other hand, did inspire her to be adventurous and she in turn did the same for him; in a few short months they had come a long way and the fact that they’d taken the time to talk everything out, made it easy to know where the line was.

Part of the reason she had been so accommodating to him disrupting her in class, was that she had made it clear that she was open to the idea of it in the first place. Both of them had discovered that they had rather well-matched lists of things they wanted to try and a ‘why not, so long as we don’t get caught’ attitude.

After heading back and sitting through the rest of the class, she made sure to reassure him that she hadn’t left because she was mad. Clearly, he had gotten that impression from her hasty exit, based on the fact he had eyed her warily as though expecting a hex after her return; he’d also looked needlessly guilty about it and she figured there was little point letting him sweat over nothing. After clearing things up, she made a point of swift revenge; making use of their planned study date, she returned the favour in the library, before heading back to their dorm and curling up together, the most the new spells let them do.

What came after (no pun intended) was the part she liked most, the peace in the wake of passion. Since his letter at the start of the year, her decent hadn’t ceased, she still fell for him a little more each day, just as she had since understanding why he had acted the way he did growing up.

Nowadays, she’d see him first thing in the morning, half asleep and with the most ridiculous bedhead and her heart would clench at the sight, or she’d catch a glint of humor in his grey eyes, maybe a hint of a loving smirk, better yet a real smile (he gave those to her so freely now)…Other times she’d see him chew his lip with worry, notice his brow furrow as he quietly fought back his demons, occasionally (though far less often) hear him plead in his sleep for his mother’s life, for her life; she would gently run her fingers through his hair or lightly stroke her thumb just over his eyebrow, both actions always seemed to calm him.

That would always be what she loved most about their relationship. Sure, sex was great, it brought them closer and it was still sort of a novelty after two or so months, but after… Being close to him in every other sense was what her soul needed, the companionship they had as friends, now carried through to create a wholistic romantic relationship and she was most definitely holding onto it with both hands. It seemed like a short amount of time to let go of the past but really she had been prepared to do so from the moment understanding was gifted to her in second year, she had waited so long for him to just ask and had spent even longer wondering if he would ever want her they way she wanted him (and she was the first to admit she wanted him every way, and meant it the way it sounded too).

The Draco she had known before was a different person in her mind, a scared, used boy; the man she had given her heart to, proved to her every day why she had let herself love him, why she had gone to save him; and she loved every jagged edge and grey area, because they were his and he let her close enough to attempt to soothe the cuts left by the sharp pieces she hoped one day to dull.
thanks so much for reading, to those subscribing and waiting for the next update I
apologise again for the wait

as always feel free to leave feedback comments etc. I make a point of replying to each
and every one and seeing notifications in my inbox is literally the best part of my day. so
please feel free to drop me a line or just say hi :)

Chapter End Notes
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

no warnings, just fluff :)

Chapter Notes

I skimmed over valentines day when I time jumped the last chapter because I wanted it to be recounted in Draco's voice.

its very ooc but I just adore him being cheesy and overly romantic so strap in for a tooth-rotting chapter :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

oOo

There were a lot of things Draco had to adjust to since Christmas break and with Hermione by his side he found it rather simple. Things were never usually simple so naturally he had to overcomplicate the simplicity and consider why he found it so; It was easy to feel invincible with her by his side for the simple fact that he would give his last breath to protect her, then again, he probably wouldn’t have to because she damn well knew how to handle herself.

One of the things that had taken longer to come to terms with was the fact that his mother was playing a far larger role in his life. The aloof and supposedly unfeeling wife of Lucius was in actual fact rather the opposite, despite her Black upbringing. He had glimpsed it once or twice since the war had ended, but had been far too self-absorbed in his own troubled thoughts to really understand what the change in her meant.

He often caught himself wondering if Hermione felt equally confused by the duality of his personality; how she managed to cope with his former personality and who he was now baffled him. His mother was suddenly warm, caring, funny and everything he had ever wanted. While he was all too willing to let her coddle him on occasion, it was too late to make any kind of impact and that saddened him. Even a few years sooner it might have had a significant effect on him.

Now though, he was an adult dealing with his ‘too nosy for her own good’ Mum, who just wanted to be closer to her son, but really needed to take a step back from trying to have a well-meaning hand in his life and relationship.

He loved his mother but Merlin she tested him. He had been immensely glad to get back to Hogwarts, so he could at least kiss his girlfriend without a comment about tradition or propriety. That had gotten old fast.

He had his privacy back for the most part (he was still researching a way to get rid of those new wards, they were in short; not fun) and intended to make the most of it when he could.
And Hermione was almost as insatiable as he was; so that worked out well. In fact, he found the tally of initiation was rather unbalanced and significantly in her favour after two months back. Not that he was complaining; and of course, he did his fair share of initiating, but it made life easy to have it made clear.

Most days he couldn’t believe it was his life. he’d wake up next to her and all he could think was that the witch in his arms was the embodiment of true wealth. To have her love after so long hiding the fact he wanted it in the first place still astounded him, and he wasn’t unaware of the fact that since Provence he had so much more belief in himself.

She had chosen him, championed for him, saved him and what more proof did he need. He was still well aware of the fact she still bore the scars of their past, but he understood that’s what the past was now; scars, no longer open ugly and bleeding.

That understanding had truly sunk in around Valentine’s day. He’d kept his promise to make her aware of the few pureblood courting traditions he wanted to keep and when she agreed that merging cultures was a fine idea he set about making plans for Valentine’s with renewed enthusiasm.

OoO

Obviously, it was their first together and after hearing about her past experiences with the day he wanted to make it something special, he wanted it to wipe the stain of past sorrow from the date and return it to what it was meant to be.

Valentine’s day actually originated from the Roman pagan festival Lupercalia; celebrating spring, love, flowers and new life. They had well and truly started over with one another and therefore he found it rather a fitting day for them.

His family had been forming their own traditions as far back as the line could be traced. While he hated the idea of emulating Lucius in any way; he decided he wouldn’t let his father spoil perfectly romantic (if sappy) traditions. Though he did wonder why his father had ever bothered with them, he didn’t think he understood the true meaning of it.

About two weeks before Valentine’s he was thrown into his memory as he dreamed; seeing his small, chubby hands grasping at flower stems while he arranged them in haphazard patterns. The dream continued and through younger eyes, he saw his father, stoic as ever looking down at him with disdain. His conscious thought returned as he continued to watch himself applaud and bounce excitedly at the prospect of giving the bunch of flowers to his mum; his father glared at him, halting him mid-clap, his son sufficiently cowed. At that point, Draco was forced into the role of silent onlooker, watching his younger self go quiet with shame, thinking he’d done something wrong. Draco felt like screaming at the injustice of someone ruining such pure joy.

He couldn’t have been more than three at the time.

Waking in the middle of the night with his dream still fresh in his mind, he held onto Hermione just a little bit tighter before drifting off again; she was the catalyst for most of his joy these days and while the memory had stirred up feelings he preferred lay dormant, he wanted to give her that part of himself, she deserved to know he was capable of cheesy gestures, he didn’t want her to ever see him so detached… she deserved to have someone care enough to make the effort for her.

He worked hard to suppress the memory after. He’d forgotten how it had ended, over the years he had softened it into something that could serve as one of few good moments with his father but even that was a lie.
Still, he excelled at choosing what to focus on, he shoved it into the box in the back of his mind where all the pain and resentment his father stirred was locked away and moved on. The same way he wanted to make Valentine’s day less sour for Hermione, he was out to prove to himself that he could keep some of the traditions he had always wanted to carry out, without letting his family spoil it.

When the week of Valentines finally arrived, he started on his first bouquet and tried to set thoughts of his parents from his mind, choosing to think about what each flower was trying to say to the woman he loved. He started with violets; for the flowers believed to grow near the Saint’s cell. They were more traditional than roses, as it was believed Valentine had made ink from the petals to write his letter with (it was an added benefit that Hermione loved purple). Next, Gardenias; to say, ‘You’re lovely’. After debating it for a while, He ended up including red roses; love and respect deserved to be present in the arrangement and finally, he added mistletoe. He knew it wasn’t Christmas, but other than asking the receiver for a kiss, it had the most apt secondary meaning; to surmount difficulties.

He was far better at arranging flowers than he had been at three, that much was certain at least there was some sort of order. When he was done he used a sticking charm to keep everything in place, another charm to preserve the petals and placed the vase beside her satchel. He’d made sure each day’s flowers would turn up well before they usually left for breakfast. Bubo was not a morning owl and somehow managed to look quite grumpy over being given such instructions; but after offering him a mouse or two for his troubles, he fluffed his feathers to communicate his acceptance.

Hermione had come out of the bathroom and he had admittedly forgotten to stick around for her reaction. He wasn’t one for grand presentations, so he’d gone to make tea for the two of them to properly start the day, only to find himself unable to properly hug her back due to the fact he was holding a jar of honey in one hand and teacups in the other. He did his best though.

“So, you think I’m lovely?”

She asked innocently, though he knew immediately she was attempting to tease him.

“I’m your boyfriend, was that ever in question?”

He teased back.

“Certainly not, you also promise to be faithful, admit you love and respect me and that you want to kiss me…”

He set the sugar down and tucked her under his chin, swaying slightly as he held her.

“You missed something.”

“uh- no I didn’t!”

“The mistletoe, it also stands for surmounting difficulties.”

She went quiet and he glanced down to see her eyes shining with fresh tears. For a moment he worried he might have said the wrong thing, but she very quickly laid his fears to rest, Her voice thick with emotion as she thanked him for being thoughtful and tearfully explained that she was overwhelmed by how lovely the sentiment he had expressed was.

With a snuffle and a quick dab at her eyes he watched her watery smile shift into her mischievous half smirk.

“So how about that kiss you asked for?”
Smiling down at her he brought his hands up from her waist to cup her face, capturing her lips with his own not caring if they were missing out on breakfast, or if they stayed there long enough to be late for class.

oOo

They just managed to make it before the toast and jam was cleared away and after grabbing a few bits and pieces, ate on their way to their morning class making conversation between bites.

“The flowers are lovely and all, but you know Valentine’s isn’t until the end of the week, right?”

“I'm well aware love, but some Roman-Gallic ancestor of mine decided that the pagan festival Lupercalia, predating Valentine’s day, deserved a week of celebrations and sacrifices to the gods. Then Christianity happened and St. Valentine... But I don't think you want to hear about all the rest, it's rather boring…”

“Oh no you don’t, you have to tell me the rest! You can’t leave me hanging!”

She immediately attempted to tickle it out of him, knowing that would be one way to break him, but he managed to trap her arms at her sides before continuing.

“…Well, after Christianity became a thing and St Valentine was canonized, they couldn't have their pagan parties anymore; time went on, some of the more familiar general traditions set in and my ancestors adapted them, not to be outdone… I've always had a theory that some Malfoy or other pissed off his wife and accidentally started a trend that carried down. but I digress; Add in the fact that the wizarding world had its own language of plants, herbs and flowers, well before the Victorians did and viola; your early bouquet.”

“Well, that's rather sweet. Honestly, I'm glad the sacrifices were phased out. Also, how dare you get all factual right before classes, you know what it does to me.”

He couldn’t help but chuckle at her comment and after reluctantly extricating himself from her hold to sit down (but still taking her free hand under the desk once they were both settled), he was rather pleased to catch her tracing the petals of a gardenia she had tucked into her curls before they left.

He’d purposely excluded the week-long part of the tradition from his summation, wanting to surprise her again. The second day, Bubo arrived on time and no less annoyed, coasting in and dropping a bunch of segmented but unarranged flowers on the coffee table. He plucked the note from his mother out from underneath the stems to read later and got to work arranging magenta Zinnia (lasting affection), Hydrangeas (understanding) and sunflowers (adoration and loyalty).

He set the vase in the same place and was wise enough to leave his hands free this time. He could hear her coming and decided to make a game of it, hiding in the closet for her to find him. He heard her surprised little ‘oh’ before she began looking for him.

“Draacooo… where are you? you know it's a small dorm, I'm going to find you eventually… Draco?”

She opened the door with an excited a-ha and he pulled her in with him, peppering kisses across her cheeks, down her neck and over her jaw before she caught his face and kissed the tip of his nose, just to tease him.

“I loved the hydrangeas, thank you”

“I had a feeling you'd like those, I saw them in your front yard and... Well you know.”
“I know…What were the other purple ones? I’ve never seen those before?”

He explained, and she returned the sentiment of lasting affection, punctuating her ‘I love you’ with slow lingering kisses.

She pulled him back into the living room and grabbed their things, faking handing him his own bag when he reached for it, before eventually conceding and handing it over. He watched her look through the bunch, pick out a perfect sunflower, shrink it and then use a sticking charm to pin it to her hair, before grabbing his hand and pulling him out the door to breakfast. He couldn’t think of a better way to start the day.

He would catch glimpses of the bright flower and any and all thoughts of his father went out the window, shooed by his pride, bolstered by the fact she had like the gesture so much she chose to carry a small part of it with her.

“How Draco? how’d you manage to get flowers that aren’t in season yet?”

“Mum figured out a spell for climate control, she could make a mint off it…”

She swatted his arm and he smiled at her as they continued their journey to potions.

“…I’m kidding! Essentially the Manor gardens might appear open air, and you’d never know if you walked through them; but each sector provides the optimal climate for whatever you want to grow. We had a few elves who really loved that garden, gave it everything they had, grew whatever they could get their hands on. I remember them teaching me about how it all worked… Mother loves roses so they featured heavily, but with so much space, there was plenty of room. We also had potions ingredients and a veggie patch growing near the kitchens.”

“I’d like to see the garden sometime… If you’re willing?”

He found there was rather a significant lump in his throat at the thought of it. The weight of her request wasn’t lost on him. They’d talked about their childhoods and he’d be lying if he didn’t admit to finding his own ways of having fun, but after everything that happened there, that she was willing to set a foot past the gate was a big deal.

He thought about it for a moment, weighing up reasons for and against before deciding that if she was asking maybe it would be best to let her take the lead. He was fairly used to the place post-war, having been forced to face his trauma through immersion; but Hermione hadn’t set foot there since her capture and while she was asking to see the gardens, he worried that the entire place might cause her

“I’d be happy to show you. It’s the only part of the place worth seeing.”

It hit him all at once how sad it made him knowing that if things were different, maybe he would have looked forward to taking her home and showing her around. But it wasn’t really a home, the structure was cold, and the walls seeped the death they’d seen into the air. It was a surprise the gardens flourished at all, considering the dark magic that radiated out of the place. But he would take her to see them if she wished. Because in reality wasn’t he an embodiment of that garden? Trying to grow out of the centuries-old and now pitch-black Malfoy shadow.

She seemed to catch the change in demeanour that came hand in hand with his past, having someone know him well enough to catch his tells was in many ways a counteractive. He’d spent years wishing someone would get close enough to him to understand him; now he had Hermione and he was more than happy to squeeze her hand in return, to let her know he was alright, bumping into her
shoulder playfully to bring them back to neutral territory.

“I know it sounds crazy, but ever since Christmas I’ve been thinking about the fact you grew up there and I just- I wanted to share that, if you’re willing… I didn’t want you to think you had to ignore your childhood memories for my sake and maybe it would do me good to have something positive to associate with it.”

He stopped her halfway down a flight of stairs, standing one step below her, they were just about the same height. He held her gaze searching for more information in her eyes or expression. Shaking his head slightly when he came up empty;

“Y-you really want to go there? I mean I get where you're coming from, but I don’t get it at the same time if that makes any sense? After everything, you intentionally want to go back?”

“Well, yes? I love every part of you and no matter what happened there, that’s your home and I’d like to see it the way you once did. I won’t let myself be the reason you feel ashamed of it, that’s not what I want for us.”

“Granger, you never cease to amaze me, but I think I can offer a fair compromise that means neither of us has to return to that wretched place.”

“For once I won’t argue with making a compromise, but I want you to know that’s what I'm willing to do.”

“Who are you and what have you done with my stubborn Granger?”

She grinned at him and he felt that familiar rush of adrenaline and adoration whenever he made her smile. Still standing on the stairs at equal height, she pulled his tie to guide him into a sweet kiss that was far shorter than he would have liked but allowed them to make it to class on time.

He added getting his hands on the family pensieve to his list. His mother had been the only one in years to know how to use it, his father never cared for the artefact and only kept it because it was a Malfoy possession. He remembered his mother showing him how it worked after he’d wandered in on her using it, but after first year never remembered seeing it again. It was a dangerous thing to have around then, and his mother would be more than happy to be able to teach him something new. In the nearly three months they’d been back at school he’d spent half his time learning how to use it, his mother overseeing his efforts; it was difficult and incredibly complex but eventually, he started to get the hang of it.

oOo

Over the course of the week leading up to Valentines, she’d chosen one flower out of each bouquet and worn it for the day. The third day she chose a white carnation (meaning sweet and lovely), the fourth day a magnolia (nobility and perseverance), the scent of citrus-honey eddying in the air around her each time she moved. On the fifth day she wore her hair up and placed daisies in the front of her bun; the tiny purple and white flowers arranged like a little crown. The sixth or rather on the 13th, she stuck freesia flowers (trust) in a neat line down the length of her French style side braid starting from the nape of her neck; interchanging between lavender, white, orange and bright magenta flowers; after heading to the three broomsticks for a butterbeer or two, Madame Rosmerta had spent ages fawning over how she’d styled it.

He hadn’t realised just how long her hair was when it was forced to conform, but he had to admit she had fit rather a few flowers into the joins of her plait; she looked beautiful, but then again she always did.
It surprised him no teachers had commented on it through the week, when he’d asked her about it she simply shrugged and joked that she could get away with almost anything, then retracted her joke realising it was perhaps in poor taste (even though he’d laughed) and offered up the fact that Lavender had done worse and Tonks had apparently never gotten detention for her wild hair during her time as a student, so what difference did a few flowers make as long as they weren’t in the way.

Even with preserving charms, the flowers from earlier in the week had already begun to wilt (their dorm looked like a florist by then but he kind of liked it. The night before Valentine’s he found her pressing a specimen of each flower in a large book (a textbook on transfiguration from second year) and found he was rather pleased to know she was sentimental like that; Enough to take the time to lovingly preserve what he considered rather a small gesture, when compared to his feelings for her.

Valentine’s day arrived, and Bubo brought red and white chrysanthemums (love, honesty and loyalty) and blue hyacinths (constancy and sincerity), the elves still hanging around the Manor were clearly happy to have something to do considering the abundance of pristine flowers, cut and wrapped meticulously. He thought about them for a moment and in an instant decided that he had been lax in not introducing her to them sooner. They’d been the ones to do most of the work raising him, his parents had imparted their values and such but the elves had managed his care and wellbeing; he realised the fact he hadn’t presented her to them sooner might be taken as an insult and he didn’t fancy being cuffed upside of the head by the ten or so elves remaining; they were the most loyal to the family and the most resilient, displeasing them; particularly his nanny Tilley, was a bad idea.

Putting his planning on the back burner, he ducked into the bathroom to retrieve a band-aid for Bubo’s latest bite; he’d handed over the mice as per their deal but Bubo was a Malfoy owl, more specifically his owl and wasn’t afraid to let him know he wasn’t happy about the inconvenience carrying anything more than a letter posed, Draco sometimes found himself relating to the entitled, temperamental bird, but never when it came to Hermione.

Draco returned to his room to find Hermione still curled up under the covers and clearly basking in the fact she had zero plans other than whatever they happened to feel like doing later. Having left the vase in its customary spot on her desk, he slipped back into bed as gently as he could for the sake of holding her. If someone had told him a year ago that he was a snuggler, he likely would have laughed in their face. ‘How the aloof hath fallen.’ He thought happily as she rolled over and nuzzled closer.

While spending a lazy Sunday dozing sounded like a great idea, they were both so hungry they couldn’t stay in bed another minute… But there was nothing he would rather be doing (except maybe finding out if she liked the gift he’d found for her, it had been killing him to keep it secret).

After making toast and tea, the little box was burning a metaphorical hole in his pocket (seeing as he had no pockets to speak of wearing boxers and said gift was hidden in his trunk). But she managed to beat him to the punch, summoning her own gift for him before he had the chance to do the same.

He couldn’t help but smirk at the fact she had wrapped it in green holographic paper. Considering their mutual love of stationery, the wrapping itself was a gift, there was nothing like it in wizarding stores that much was certain and he was like a cat with a ball of string; fascinated by the shifting reflection, twisting it this way and that.

“Just open it already! I swear-”

He looked up and matched her playful grin before peeling back the sticky tape and pulling the box out without a single tear.
He opened it up and nestled into black tissue paper was a small crescent-shaped piece of what appeared to be moonstone. The reference to her calling him Mr. Moonburn every time they went outside wasn’t lost on him but he was curious as to why she had deemed it something he might appreciate (short of being an interesting addition to a rock collection). She seemed to catch the question and with a gentle smile, held out her hand, asking him to pass it to her.

She stepped behind him and murmured a spell he’d never heard before. She reached around him for a moment and then fiddled with something at the back of his neck.

“I’ve been sitting on this idea ever since I teased you, I just didn’t think I’d be able to give it to you so soon. I’ve charmed them so only you and I can see… I know it’s silly but after we had that discussion about traditions over Christmas, I decided to make these myself; happy accident that it’s also your birthstone, or at least one of them is…”

She was rambling and as much as he usually loved her rambling, it was slightly less adorable when it was cryptic and he was curious. However, he didn’t have to wait long for a clarification on what she meant by ‘these.’

She took a step closer to him and grasped for a silver chain around her neck that hadn’t been there a moment ago. From underneath her shirt, she pulled out a circular onyx charm and after picking up his own, fiddled for a moment before showing him how the two stones fit together. ‘Oh…’

He glanced between her and their pendants. Soft grey light emanated from the seam of the two stones and he could feel the gentle thrum of positive energy in the onyx and the soothing whisper of the moonstone. He stared at her in wonder;

“Are they reacting to one another? how did you even-?”

“I fused them using magic and then separated them for a perfect fit; It was an accident. Anyway, Muggles have jewellery like this, it's usually cheap and made for friends, but there are some for couples and I know guys don’t normally wear pendants so if you want me to make it into something el-”

“It’s perfect, you’re perfect. Thank you.”

She was still holding the two contrasting stones together, so he was already close enough to tilt her face up and kiss her sweetly. It took everything he had not to start something more (not that he could anyway), he’d never really understood the whole constant need thing until her. She kissed him back and he honestly couldn’t remember a time he’d been happier.

He knew they were stealing moments but the eye of the storm still gave them time for normal joy. having received her gift he practically ran to his trunk to grab hers.

The purple wrapping stood out against his clothes and he rushed back out with a smile on his face, the only point of comparison for how excited and nervous he felt about giving it to her was when he was little, waiting for his mother’s approval on whatever trinket he found for her.

Her delicate fingers pried open the paper and lifted the lid of the box. She looked incredibly surprised but he had a flash of worry that might not like it.

He’d given her a ring. It looked nothing an engagement ring (he knew he didn’t have to worry about it coming off that way) and it didn’t look like a traditional promise ring either; it was a delicate arrangement of white topaz in the shape of a six petal flower, between each faceted petal, tiny opals nestled in the gaps, completing the circle and in the center a slightly larger, circular blue opal.
He’d intended it to be sort of a pre-promise ring, ring. Something she could wear that had meaning but wasn’t pushing things along too quickly. It was easy to forget how new things really were and while he had ignored his upbringing in some ways, he was still very stuck on the whole time constraints of progression; promise rings were usually given after a year or more, then an engagement ring; but he hadn’t wanted to wait so he’d decided to both keep and break tradition, choosing something with no history bar their own to give her.

And based on her reaction she more than liked it, telling him over and over she loved it while circling it gently with her index finger. She set the box back down and pulled him into a tight hug that crushed the air from his lungs and trapped his arms by his sides. Great minds and all that though he did the same; he could feel the pressure of his pendant and hers in his skin while she hugged him and already it was serving its purpose calming and centering him. He wondered if she had picked up on the fact that its onyx mate represented new beginnings. She almost definitely had and he loved that like him she searched for meaning in what she was giving him.

oOo

Chapter End Notes

as always feel free to leave comments, feedback or kudos; it gives me so much motivation to keep writing and i love replying to all of you :)

till next time

xo Em

End Notes

comments and kudos give me life and inspiration
please feel free to leave feedback or even suggestions

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