### Summary

When Hermione Granger awakens in the dungeons of Malfoy Manor it quickly becomes clear to her that Lucius Malfoy has abducted her for a reason. Why is she there? What could he possibly want from her? Why does his gaze linger far longer than it should? He knows what she is, and yet that doesn’t seem to stop him.

Lucius Malfoy was not the man his father had wanted him to be. He was not the man the Dark Lord had tried to twist him into. He was something different altogether, and he was more dangerous because of it. Even now, he could feel the piece hidden deep within, clawing its way to the surface, ravenous and deadly after being so long denied. It hungered and he didn’t know how long he could push it back down.
Part of him didn’t want to, and now with the Dark Lord’s return, it would be all too easy to sink back into the darkness he had long ago left behind.

(New more detailed summary in the first chapter! It's too long for this blurb.)

Notes

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As a pure-blood, Lucius Malfoy has always known what he is: a product, an investment in the future for the venerable house of Malfoy. He has always known, as Abraxas Malfoy had made abundantly clear to him, that the product was faulty. It was why the Dark Lord had found it so easy to bind Lucius to his cause.

Lucius Malfoy was not the man his father had wanted him to be. He was not the man the Dark Lord had tried to twist him into. He was something different altogether, and he was more dangerous because of it. Even now, he could feel the piece hidden deep within, clawing its way to the surface, ravenous and deadly after being so long denied. It hungered and he didn’t know how long he could push it back down.

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As Hermione fights for a future worth living in, she will discover truths about herself she never imagined.

As Lucius fights to break free of the chains that bind him to the past, he will discover that he might not be as defective as led to believe.

**Author Note:** I wanted to write a Lucius/Hermione story with a slightly different take on the characters than I have seen previously. There will be lots of kink. Some of it might not be your cup of tea. That’s fine. No kink-shaming and no flames please!

**Disclaimer:** Anything recognizable is not mine. I make absolutely no money off this and am in no way affiliated with the Harry Potter franchise. I write for fun and greatly appreciate J.K. Rowling’s lovely sandbox to play in.

No beta, so all mistakes are mine. If you notice any glaring errors, please let me know. I try to edit before posting, but I am still human. (Begins during the holiday break of 5th year. Might be underage where you live. Tagged just to be safe.)
A miserable groan signaled Hermione Granger’s slow return to full wakefulness. She attempted to swallow around the dry tongue stuck fast to the roof of her mouth, but her throat was too parched to manage it effectively, and thus she surmised that she must have been unconscious for a long time. That thought brought to mind the smirking form of Lucius Malfoy, standing over her as her vision had rapidly dimmed to blackness.

The sudden memory cleared the fog from her mind, and brought her brain screeching back to full alertness. Unfortunately, it was accompanied by a screaming pain in her neck, arms, and back as she startled fully awake. The protest of her muscles and joints brought forth an agonized moan as she raised her chin from where it lay against her chest.

Once the pain in her neck subsided, she tentatively began to study her surroundings. Torchlight danced off the dark stone walls from a single sconce, a nearby tabletop stood, covered with neatly ordered gleaming torture instruments, and her neatly folded clothes lay on top of a chair. All of them. Her bra and knickers lay on top practically mocking her with how innocently they sat there. The dungeon, she assumed it belonged to the Malfoys, was otherwise unfurnished as far as she could tell in the dim light. The air was cold against her bared skin and Hermione imagined she would be able to see her breath if it weren't so dark.

She pulled ineffectually against her restraints, not really believing that she could get free, but feeling the need to at least give it a try. She was standing, spread-eagle between two thick wooden support beams, an arm and leg bound to each. The chains binding her ankles were taut, and even though her feet were only hip width apart, the chain attaching her ankles together meant she wouldn't be attempting to kick anyone. For him to have taken such a precaution, she hoped the bastard had some personal experience with that. There was a bit of slack present in the chains binding her wrists, though there wasn’t nearly enough slack in each to move around. There was just enough to make the chains rattle whenever she did try to move, so that every time she shifted position she would be reminded of her circumstances, and every time she fell asleep she would sag in her bonds and wake painfully. Her shoulders and back were still screaming.

She was a little surprised to notice that rather than metal shackles binding her, Malfoy had chosen instead to use padded medical restraints. Rather than relief, a wave of trepidation rolled through her. She was sure the decision had nothing to do with her comfort. There had to be a reason Malfoy was taking care not to mark her up, and that reason probably involved an extended stay in his dungeon.

Lucius studied the shivering girl as she dozed fitfully. His eyes roamed over every inch of her, lingering on her breasts, peaked from the cold, the curve of her hip, and the nest of closely cropped curls at the juncture of her thighs. While her body was nice enough to pique his interest, that alone never held it. Narcissa was beautiful, after all, and they hadn't been intimate since Draco’s conception was confirmed.

He took a step closer to her, reaching out to caress her cheek, recalling to mind several details from the file he had assembled on her. It was never the packaging that held his interest, and he knew quite well what she was capable of. This girl held his interest, and she had for far longer than he cared to admit. Lucius felt his trousers grow tight, and mentally slapped himself at the direction of his thoughts. Right now, he needed to exercise control, difficult as it would be. He had a lot of work to do, and so little time in which to accomplish it. He shouldn’t be indulging such base
thoughts when so much depended on her cooperation.

Just as he had regained control of himself, she let out the faintest whimper in her fitful sleep. Lucius cursed as the sound shot straight to his groin and he imagined that whimper in a much different context. If only Draco hadn’t complained about the girl so much over the years, he wouldn’t be in this predicament. Then again, Lucius thought to himself, if not for Draco’s incessant whingeing, he might never have considered her to begin with.

The dungeon had cooled significantly over the last several hours. Hermione wasn’t sure how long it had really been, but it felt like a long time. She came awake gradually as unexpected, but welcome warmth caressed the side of her face. Unconsciously, she leaned into it, still not quite aware of her surroundings.

“It's time to wake up now, Miss Granger.” The voice crooned honey-smooth in her ear and she blinked slowly in confusion as wakefulness returned. “There we are.” It was the smugness in that voice that finally shook the last of the cobwebs from her mind, reminding her where she was and just who she was with. Lucius Malfoy’s cold, arrogant, grey eyes bore into hers. They judged her. They dismissed her. She longed to claw them out.

She snapped at the hand caressing her cheek, but he snatched it away too fast for her to sink her teeth into it. He laughed derisively, and she pulled against her bonds, a white-hot rage overtaking her. “Bastard! You won’t be laughing when my friends come and rescue me. You’ll spend the rest of your life rotting in Azkaban!” she screamed at him, or tried to at least. Her throat was so dry that the words came out as more of a croak than anything else.

“Your friends won’t even know that you’re gone.” He amended his statement at her incredulous look. “I should say, rather, that they won’t come looking for you.” He let the moment play out as he stalked around her, giving her time to puzzle over this information.

Of course, he was lying. Harry and Ron would absolutely find her once they realized something was wrong. She had the utmost faith in them. Unless… Fear coiled inside her. What had Lucius Malfoy done, that they wouldn’t even miss her? Were they even okay?

A heartbeat after the question manifested in her mind, he stepped in close, pressing against her back, his body heat warming her chilled skin. She was so sick over what he might have done, the fact that he was pressing up against her naked body nearly went unnoticed. Nearly. Which was probably why he didn't leave it at that.

With one hand, he reached up and grasped the chain just above her bound wrist. With the other, he caressed the skin over her hipbone tenderly, splaying his long fingers wide, conveying with the display his supreme confidence and the control he had over her. The action caused the thick folds of his soft, fur robes to close around her, leaving only the front of her body exposed to the cold.

The heady scent of his expensive cologne wrapped around her brain until she felt as if he had burrowed inside her like a parasite. His cologne was surprisingly delicate for a men's scent, and yet the spiced aroma invading her senses insidiously proclaimed Lucius’ masculinity.

It was an assault on two fronts that punctuated the lack of power she had in this situation. Hermione was mortified by his proximity, even as his body was a shield against the cold. The intimate nature of his touch was far worse than she had anticipated, and she shuddered. Her skin crawled at the thought that a Death Eater, a blood-supremacist, was the first to touch her in such a manner.
He whispered directly into her ear, sounding so sure of himself, his warm breath stirring small strands of her wild hair. “I’m sure you have an inkling, an idea perhaps.”

His fingers kept moving on her hip, matching the intimacy in his voice. “There are probably a thousand different scenarios running through that brain. Oh, but what if you’re wrong about all of them? What exactly could a big bad Death Eater do right under Dumbledore’s nose? Would you like to know?”

Hermione nodded mutely. Her insatiable curiosity was always getting the best of her, although in this situation, knowing was at least better than wondering. If she knew what he had done, she might just find a hole in his scheme that she could exploit.

“If you want it,” his low voice crooned seductively against the shell of her ear, “you need to ask for it. Something you should keep in mind going forward.”

He was toying with her, but then why wouldn't he? In this situation, he had all the power. She swallowed her revulsion and responded in a quivering voice, “Please tell me what you did.”

He paused for a moment, hand playing at her hip, as if considering her request. Would he grant it, or was it just another power play? All at once that overwhelming heat at her back was gone. He released her and stepped back around so that he could see her face as he told his tale, dragging the fingertips of the hand so recently caressing her across her lower back as he did so.

“I did nothing, Miss Granger.” He seemed amused at his statement and the crestfallen look on her face. “It was you who wrote the letter in the Gryffindor common room, telling your friends that you were going home and wouldn’t be staying with them over the break. You see, you were so homesick that you just couldn’t bear to not go and visit your parents on holiday.”

Hermione thought she was going to be sick all over the dungeon floor even though she knew she had nothing in her stomach to retch up. The snake coiling and roiling in the pit of her stomach began to move faster as he continued. A letter she had written…

“Naturally there was no time for goodbyes. You lost track of time submitting last minute assignments, and it was all you could do to pack a bag and get to the train on time. You wished your friends a happy holiday, and reminded them to study for their potions practicums, lest they forget. Does that sound at all plausible?”

Hermione felt despair as Lucius finished, grinning widely at her. It was exceedingly simple, believable, and that last bit did sound like her, too much like her. “As I said, you won’t be missed.”

She swallowed thickly, hoping she sounded more confident than she felt. “I won’t tell you anything. I won’t betray my friends.”

“You mistake me, Miss Granger. I don’t want information about your friends. I don’t care about them.” He cupped the side of her face with one hand and with the other, tapped the side of her head at the temple.

“I want this,” his eyes bore into her once more, but this time, there was something in them she couldn’t place, almost as if he were searching for something. She didn’t know what it was, but it scared her all the same.

“They claim that you are the brightest witch of your age. I seek the truth of that.” Lucius turned for the door, leaving Hermione flabbergasted.

“If that’s true, then why am I chained naked in your dungeon, you sick bastard?” she called out at
his retreating form.

Lucius looked back over his shoulder and smiled faintly. Hermione wished in that moment that she had kept her mouth closed as his eyes fell upon her once more, roving over her naked body before his gaze, at last, snapped back to hers, but he said nothing, and instead simply left the room.
Hermione could see no way to turn the situation to her advantage. She had no idea why he wanted her. Did he think she would join his cause and betray her loved ones? He was an idiot if he thought that, and Hermione knew that Lucius Malfoy was no idiot. Had he not demonstrated as much to her by now? He had gotten her to leave a message for her friends and pack her bags so as not to arouse suspicion, she assumed through the use of an *Imperious* curse, and had smuggled her out of Hogwarts without raising any alarms. She could hope that wasn’t the case, but he had seemed sure enough that she couldn’t count on that line of thinking. She shook her head to clear it. It seemed unlikely help would be forthcoming, and she had to operate under that assumption.

Dehydration was already setting in, and the first sharp stabs of hunger began to gnaw at her gut. She hadn’t eaten since the morning of her abduction, having been far too concerned with submitting Snape and McGonagall’s last-minute assignments, Malfoy had been right about that part, before the holiday to really eat a proper breakfast then.

*Maybe I’ll die of dehydration before he gets any information out of me,* Hermione thought darkly. He had to be operating under Voldemort’s orders. It was the one thing she was sure of. She had no idea what he thought she knew, but she would do her best to keep her secrets.

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It was the smell that brought her back to reality. What had been merely a sharp stab of hunger before, had become a living thing inside her. It was all she could focus on as the smell of bacon and eggs assaulted her nose. She opened her eyes to see that Lucius had cleared off his torture table and was having breakfast, looking for all the world like he belonged there, like he normally ate breakfast in his dungeon whilst reading the morning paper.

He wore no cloak this time but was well dressed as usual. His jacket hung on the back of his chair and the sleeves of his crisp shirt were rolled back; the dark mark on his left forearm clearly visible as he slathered a dollop of jam over a slice of toast. Had he used it to call Voldemort? If so, Hermione didn’t think she had much longer left to live.

He followed her gaze to where it rested. “Don’t worry,” he said with a smile, seeming to sense the direction of her thoughts. “It’s just the two of us.”

Hermione’s voice was extremely hoarse now. “Why are you doing this to me? You’re married. What would your wife think?”

“Why? Because I have a young woman chained naked before me? I don’t see how that matters.” He appeared genuinely amused by her question. “It’s a marriage of bloodlines, my dear. There is a mutual respect, but we have everything we want from each other. I have an heir to carry on my name, even if he is a spoilt little git, and she has extended vacations in the south of France.” He took a bite, chewed, and swallowed. When he spoke again there was no malice in his tone. “I’m sure she’s dallying with one or several of her boy toys at this exact moment.”

Hermione had no idea what to say to that. The idea of marriage as a business transaction was completely foreign to her. “That doesn’t explain why-” the smells distracted her for a moment and she nearly lost her train of thought. “You don’t have to do this…”

“You’re sure about that?” At that moment, noting the direction of her gaze, he feigned sudden embarrassment. “Oh my, how terribly rude of me. I haven’t offered you anything. I fear I’m being a
terrible host. Are you hungry?"

Just then, her stomach growled loudly as if attempting to answer his question on its own. No! she thought, I can’t give in to him. I would rather die than betray my friends.

Once more, as if seeing into the truth of her thoughts, he responded, “I should warn you, before you heroically think about going on a hunger strike, that you won’t die from it. You’ll just wish for death. Fervently.”

He stood and gently touched the chains that bound her. “A nasty bit of magic, concocted by some long-dead ancestor. As long as these chains bind you, you’ll feel that hunger gnaw at you until it’s all you can think about, and it consumes your every thought. It will eat away at your resolve, until I'm forced to immobilize you, just to keep you from cannibalizing yourself. You'll be driven to insanity, but you'll never slip over the edge and death will never take you. You'll just teeter on the brink until you finally give in to me, and when you do, you'll make the conscious decision to do so.” He paused. “Today is the fourth day. I doubt you’ll hold out much longer.”

His words sank in. Four days? And she already felt like this? She felt empty. But then a small voice tickling at her brain asked her if his words could even be trusted. Her eyes flicked over to the table again, to the glass goblet. Would Lucius Malfoy really drink wine for breakfast? She didn't know. It didn’t seem appropriate, but would a Malfoy truly care about propriety? If that was a lie, could she have been here for much longer? Her stomach seemed to think so. What would he gain from lying about that?

“So, make your choice, Miss Granger. Hungry? Thirsty?”

She couldn’t tear her eyes away from the meal as her stomach tightened painfully. “Yes,” she whispered.

He said nothing.

He made no move.

She frowned.

Then his previous words came back to her. If you want it, you need to ask for it. Could she really bring herself to say what he wanted to hear? Her pragmatic brain realized that she had to if she wanted any hope of getting out of this place. She was utterly alone. If she didn’t take what was offered now while she still had her wits, she would be too weak to fight back if an opportunity presented itself.

She stared at the food on the table. Her stomach rumbled with longing and she opened her mouth only to have her throat seize up on her. Trying again, she managed to croak out, “May I have something to drink?”

If anything, Lucius’ smirk widened and turned downright wicked. He snagged his goblet from the table and downed the remaining contents. Hermione’s anger at his actions turned to wide eyed horror as he casually leaned back against the table and reached for his belt. His eyes never left her face and his smile never wavered as he made a great show of deliberately unbuckling the belt.

Hermione looked away from him, staring off into the dark recesses of the dungeon. It only served to make her senses focus on the only sound in the room. The metal clinked softly and the supple leather hissed as it pulled free from the buckle. He slowly unhooked the buttons of his fly and the cloth of his breeches rasped repeatedly, loud in the quiet room, once, twice, three times, four as the
buttons were pulled through the holes.

Out of the corner of her eye, she could see that he stilled for a moment and then he finally pushed his trousers down far enough to free his cock. Seemingly against her will, her gaze was drawn back to him as he waited for her to look at him. The air left her lungs in a rush as she caught sight of him, and she tore her eyes away, face turning red. He was immaculately groomed and he wore nothing underneath his trousers. Somehow neither revelation surprised her.

Hermione had overheard other girls gossiping in the Gryffindor common rooms and had seen the occasional magazine that someone had managed to smuggle into the school, well mostly Lavender, but his was the first she'd actually seen. Her gaze inevitably fell upon him again. The short dark-blonde hairs framed the base of his cock just so, the blushing pink tip peeking out from beneath the foreskin. She realized that he was still only half-erect but would be rather impressive at full attention. Hermione mentally berated herself for admiring his cock. The man looked down on her after all, despised her, for one of the stupidest reasons imaginable. All thought fled her mind as he gripped himself firmly and began to stroke the length of his cock over the now emptied cup.

“I would prefer to do this the old-fashioned way but I don’t trust you not to bite me.”

Hermione didn’t reply. Couldn't. She had never witnessed a man wank in front of her and she found herself unable to look away. He grew several more inches as he continued. Lucius’s hand danced along the shaft, putting on a show just for her, expertly twisting, varying speed and grip, and occasionally pinching the foreskin closed over the engorged head. The low grunts and sighs he made weren’t very loud, but they echoed hollowly off the stone walls sounding absolutely filthy. His hand moved faster, and his breathing grew more ragged. She realized with a start that he must be getting close to finishing.

With a low groan, his head fell back as thick, creamy liquid pulsed into the glass goblet, filling it. To her it looked nearly a third full. He milked the last few drops with a small sigh, setting the glass down beside himself momentarily. Lucius tucked himself back inside, and buttoned his trousers back up, snatching up the goblet once more.

He stepped close and dangled the goblet between thumb and forefinger in front of her, a lazy satisfied smile playing on his lips. “Still thirsty? I’m afraid it’s all we have on the menu today.”

She swallowed her disgust and nodded resolutely. Her situation still hadn’t changed, even if the rules just had, and if she could do this, certainly he would reward her with actual food. He had to.

“Yes, I’m still thirsty.” Her face glowed red from embarrassment, the blush creeping down her chest.

He cradled her head, tilting it back with one hand, and tipped the goblet over her lips with the other. It may have been because she hadn’t eaten in days but the idea of what she was drinking repulsed her more than the taste. It was both bitter and sweet as the fluid mixed with the few drops of wine that had remained in the bottom of the glass. She gulped greedily at the offering, hating herself for wishing there were more, and refusing to look at him when the glass was empty. He brushed a stray lock of hair from her forehead, planting a gentle kiss there, and whispered condescendingly, “Good girl. I’ll return for lunch.” He was long gone when the numbness left, and the first sobs began to wrack her body.
Questions in the Dark

He returned for lunch as promised, or rather, for the second time. Hermione didn't know if it were truly lunchtime or not. He followed the same script as before. First, he made her ask for it, then wanked, and then fed her from the cup. She had tried being more specific by asking for food, only to be told she could consider it broth, and when she had asked for water, he had said there was probably water in it. The amused smirk had never left his face during the entire ordeal.

He kissed her gently after he had “fed” her, this time on the lips, before whispering “Good girl,” only this time he didn’t leave immediately. He leaned his hip against the table, folding his arms in front of him and regarded her with a cool stare. “Tell me about being sorted into your house.”

She scoffed at him, “You have got to be kidding… Why would you even care? What could you possibly want to know?” What kind of question was that after what he had just had her do? Was the bastard insane?

He wasn’t smirking at her anymore. “Quite the contrary. You were sorted into Gryffindor. Tell me about it. Did the hat speak to you? Was it immediate? What about other possibilities?”

Hermione didn’t know what his line of questioning was about, but didn’t see the harm in telling him since it was practically public knowledge. Maybe she would get a real meal in exchange. It had been so long ago though, that she had to really think back to her first day at Hogwarts. “I was really nervous, so I don’t remember everything. It stalled for a bit. It had to think for a while and it muttered to itself about where to put me but never spoke directly to me. Why does it matter?”

“I’m on the board of governors at Hogwarts. I have access to your file. Why aren’t you in Ravenclaw? Seems like it would have made more sense.”

It was an unexpected question, and she had no response to it. She knew the hat had considered it, but she had never really given it much thought since being placed.

“Throughout the history of the school,” he continued, “few witches or wizards at the head of their class have been from any other house. It's unusual.”

“Voldemort wasn’t-”

“I somehow doubt he cared about classes like herbology.”

He was waiting for her to answer but what could she say? “I don’t know why the hat put me in Gryffindor.” She suddenly grew angry, although at what specifically, she couldn’t say. Maybe she was just tired of the smug look on his face while he treated her like- well she didn't even know.

“That can’t be what this is all about. You’re obviously intelligent. Do you even know why the hat put you in Slytherin?”

Her sudden outburst didn’t seem to affect him. He simply stated, “Malfoys are always sorted into Slytherin, regardless of our individual talents.”

He regarded her critically for a moment and then picked up the goblet once again. She held her breath in anticipation as he tapped his wand on the rim and said, “Aguamenti.” It filled itself full with cool, refreshing water. Hermione nearly sighed in relief.

He brought it towards her, but then narrowed his eyes, and said quietly, “I expected more.” He tipped the glass, pouring out the contents until a single mouthful remained. She felt like crying as
she swallowed it down, the single gulp barely enough to lessen the painful burn in her throat.

Deciding that the conversation was over, he turned and headed for the door. “I’ll return for dinner.” Hermione's shoulders slumped as much as possible in her restraints. He wasn't going to feed her after all.

When she finally slept, she dreamed that she was back at Hogwarts with her friends. Harry and Ron laughed beside her as they made their way through the crowded halls. Even Professor Snape’s disdain and Draco’s ridicule gave her the sense of being home. Reality, however, crept into her dream-world unbidden. A welcome hug from a friend became Lucius Malfoy’s possessively intimate touch, and she startled awake with a wrenching sound of despair.

She had only allowed herself to cry that first time. It wasn’t helpful, her pragmatic brain decided, and she chose instead to use the brain Malfoy claimed he wanted. Two questions had been on the agenda for dinnertime.

“What spells had she already performed that she hadn’t learned in her classes?” Telling him that would give him even more of an advantage over her, so she kept that information to herself, claiming that she had read about many in her books, but had been too fearful to try them without supervision. He had somehow oddly seemed pleased with her answer.

“What sorts of things had she learned in the restricted section of the library?” She had told him about searching for information on Nicholas Flamel. She knew she couldn't simply stonewall him on every question, and after all this time, the information had seemed harmless. Once again, her answer had strangely seemed to be what he wanted to hear, and had earned her a little extra water in addition to his usual offering. She just didn’t know how it all tied together, and as pleased as he seemed, he still hadn't offered her food.

Hermione knew there was a puzzle that she needed to solve. There were clues in his questions that would help her figure out why she was here. She puzzled over the bits of information he had dangled in front of her, picking apart every word she could remember. It was just so damned hard to think with her brain so fuzzy. The hunger was a part of her now that she couldn't ignore. He'd been right about that. How much longer, she wondered, before her arm started looking tasty?

His offerings had left much to be desired, and the little water he had given her wasn't nearly enough. She was no stronger now than when they had begun and had, in fact, probably grown much weaker.

She didn’t know what his endgame truly was, but she was sure there was one thing he wanted from her. It wasn’t in the questions he asked. The clues were in his body language, and in what he had left unsaid. She had done her best to ignore the way his eyes roamed over her body when his hands were upon himself, the way his gaze lingered on her mouth after he had lowered the cup from her lips.

Hermione had feared where they would eventually end up that first time he had left her in the dungeon as he looked back at her over his shoulder. She had expected him to just take it from her though, not to force her to beg for it. There was a reason people feared his reputation. He was unpredictable. Foolishly, she had never been afraid of him before.

Maybe that was the answer, she thought. Maybe she had to be as unpredictable as him, and offer to make a trade no Gryffindor would ever dream of making. Could she really take that next step though, and offer him what he obviously wanted, just for the hope of a decent meal and potential escape? How important was it to her to try to get back to her life? She weighed her options with her customary logical calculations: drink from a glass for the rest of her life or take the risk and
gamble. She had the rest of the night to decide.
The Sleeping Beast Awakens

Hermione awoke to the feel of Lucius’ warmth wrapping seductively around her chilled body. It wasn't the first time he'd woken her in that way. If she didn't escape soon, it wouldn't be the last. He gripped her hips, drawing her closer as he nuzzled her neck, ghosting his lips over the surface of her skin. She unconsciously sought out his warmth and leaned into his touch as much as she could, feeling his grip tighten as he smiled against her throat. The feeling was pleasant if she didn’t think about who was pressed up against the front of her from shoulder to hip.

“Tell me what you want,” he demanded gruffly in her ear.

Hermione took a deep breath and said the words before she could stop herself, “I want to please you.”

Lucius pulled back suddenly, searching her face for any signs of deception, clearly suspicious of her sudden and generous offer. His long, drawn-out gaze caused her to duck her head in embarrassment, her cheeks coloring under his intense scrutiny.

“Please me in what way?” he asked playfully.

She met his gaze reluctantly. He seemed amused by the new turn the game had taken. The stakes may have been high for her, but it was most certainly a game to him. “In whatever way you wish.”

He crossed his arms and tapped his lips with one finger as if considering her offer. Hermione didn’t know it but in truth he was reeling and playing for time while he thought. He had mostly stuck to his plan, albeit, with a few amendments, playing the monster that she had likely expected, just to see how far she would bend and yet remain true to herself.

Lucius had anticipated another round of questions and answers. He had expected her to try to make a deal with him, ask him what he wanted, perhaps even offer information, useless of course, in exchange for her freedom on his way out the door. Lucius had, in fact, been prepared for it, and had been readying himself to end the game at last. He hadn’t anticipated this turn of events or her carte blanche offer. Truthfully, he hadn’t anticipated several of her actions thus far. She wasn't like others he had held captive over the years, and she kept him off balance because of it. It intrigued him.

The rational side of him hesitated, aware that accepting could well endanger everything he was working towards. He knew he should go ahead and end the game now and finally tell her what he wanted. Her hesitant words, however; softly spoken, were arousing something in him that ran on pure instinct, and as it woke up, he only grew more intrigued.

That part of him was playful in a twisted kind of way. It made him an expert torturer, skills he had put to use in service to his dark master, but he couldn’t remember the last time he had let it out to play for a different reason. Most people never saw that side of him. Such conduct was beneath a man of his breeding, or so he had been told many times. As a result, Lucius normally kept that side of himself tightly reined in, but it was always there, just beneath the surface.

Waiting.

And it had been roused when he had decided, on a whim, to taunt her with the goblet. Lucius had never planned for her to accept it. He shouldn't have followed though when she did. He most certainly should not be entertaining the ideas currently running rampant through his head.
He had been sorely tempted before. Now he was painfully aroused. Did she have any idea what she was offering? How could she? Then again, that steely determination despite her obvious fear told him that yes, she did know, that she had judged it a worthy sacrifice to make. It was that or she was bluffing. He wanted to believe the former, but suspected the latter was more likely.

*Why not find out?* the thing inside him whispered, insidiously. *Why not test her one last time?*

That dark part of him was interested in her offer and he was unwilling to fully rein it in. Lucius felt the feral smile steal across his features as he blatantly scanned her from head to toe. How far would she go? What would she do? Was she actually bluffing? He just had to know. He hoped she wouldn’t shatter irreparably. After all, she was no use to him broken.

His molten silver eyes bore into hers, darkening rapidly. When he spoke, his voice was dangerous in a way it hadn’t been before. She swallowed, a little unnerved by the look in his eyes. Inside she was trembling, but she had already decided. It was her best option for getting free. She could do this and bide her time and plan for escape.

He took a half step toward her and the corner of his lip quirked upwards. His gaze never left hers. “Would you use your hands?”

She bit her lip before answering, “I would.”

He reached out, and brushed his thumb over her lips, “And would you use your mouth?”

“I would.”

He stepped back in close, cupping her cheek. His mouth hovered briefly over the skin on her neck as he breathed in her scent. “You would swallow?” he whispered as he pulled back to look at her.

Hermione almost snorted at that but refrained. She had already swallowed three times now. What did a fourth matter? “Gladly.”

Lucius held her gaze.

His hand dropped to her chest where he cupped one breast, sweeping his thumb gently over the nipple, feeling it peak beneath his touch. Her breath hitched, she released a tiny exhalation, and Lucius filed the information away for future use as his hand stroked firmly down her ribcage and over her stomach.

“And if I wanted to fuck you?” Just as he finished posing his question, his hand finished trailing down her body to cup her sex possessively, touching her there for the first time.

She couldn't stop her reaction, couldn't keep from shying away at his touch. The tiniest frown creased her forehead as she regained control of herself. “If it would please you,” she replied quietly. Hesitantly.

Lucius had his answer, so he released her and moved on. “Tell me why I should believe you. Surely all your thoughts are bent toward escape. Why would I release you and take that chance?”

“I haven’t had a proper meal in days,” she ignored the smirk he graced her with. “If you think I’m capable right now, that makes one of us. And I’m sure your house-elves are under strict orders to thwart any escape attempts on my part.” He inclined his head, agreeing with her. “In short, I’m at your mercy until you choose otherwise.”

“So, you think to ingratiate yourself toward me? What reward do you hope to earn for yourself?”
“Whatever you think appropriate,” she replied quietly.

He regarded her coolly for a moment, no doubt attempting to suss out her plan, before reaching up to unbind one wrist. “Then please me, and we’ll see what kind of reward you earn.”

Her hand slipped heavy from the restraint and she shook life back into it gingerly. She reached out but hesitated, pulling back and swallowing thickly. “I haven’t actually…”

Lucius took her hand and placed it deliberately on his erection. “Just do what feels right and if I want something specific, I’ll tell you.” She could tell from the smirk and the tone of his voice that he expected her to pull away.

Hermione gave a tentative squeeze and saw Lucius’ hand flex near imperceptibly before relaxing at his side. She unfastened his belt, undid the buttons of his trousers one by one, untucked his shirt, and with a shaking hand, reached inside. Her hand closed around the shaft and she gave him a few experimental pumps.

He tilted her chin up until she was looking him in the eyes. “There is no need to be quite so gentle.”

With a small nod, she gripped him tighter and her strokes became surer as she pulled his cock free. Hermione was fascinated by the way his velvet foreskin slid over the hard shaft, it didn't feel anything like she had anticipated, and she toyed with it, attempting to mimic his previous motions.

“Yes, just like that. You were paying attention. Ever the good little student, aren't you?” he murmured as he rolled one of her nipples between his fingers. She concentrated on her task, attempting not to blush and failing miserably.

He was controlled, his measured breathing revealing little and Hermione found herself relying on him to guide her in order to complete her task. Each whispered command was quickly followed by a sigh of contentment or hitched breath whenever she did as he instructed. With each stroke, the rosy blush grew darker. He had never been so close when he had pleasured himself before. She had never had such an intimate view before.

He grew impossibly hard in her hand as she continued. His commands were breathy, as he urged her to play with his balls, to squeeze and roll them between her fingers, and it wasn’t long before a milky pearl beaded in the slit of his cock. Before it grew heavy enough to slide down the length of him, Hermione swiped the pad of her thumb over it, gathering up the fluid.

For the first time since she had gripped him in hand, she deviated from his instructions. Without thinking, she popped her thumb into her mouth, the now-familiar taste of him blossoming on her tongue. His veneer of self-control fell away at the sight and she actually heard him growl softly.

He was near violent in his haste to unbind her other wrist and the moment it was ripped free, fisted his hands in her hair, hauling her roughly to the floor, though she would have gone willingly at that point. That small taste of him had only whet her appetite and now she craved more.

Her knees barked painfully against the floor causing her to cry out. Lucius used the opportunity to slip the head of his cock past her parted lips and immediately, though rather clumsily, she sucked him in further. He gathered her hair over one shoulder so he could watch.

Lucius maintained his vice-like grip with one hand, using her hair to guide her head into whatever position he wanted. It was somewhat painful, but she didn’t fight him, concentrating instead on the familiar taste of him and her quest for more. His opposite hand alternated between caressing her face and neck and stroking the part of his shaft she couldn't fit in her mouth.
She clearly had no idea what she was doing yet, Lucius remarked to himself, but she was enthusiastic and it helped to make up for the lack in technique. He could guess the reason for her enthusiasm but pushed the thought from his mind. At that moment, surrounded by the sinful, heat of her mouth, he didn’t care if she was eagerly fellating him because she saw him as a food source so long as she was doing it. What he did care about was that she looked and sounded positively filthy on her knees before him, moaning as she sucked enthusiastically.

Lucius resisted the urge to thrust down her throat as he once again felt the scrape of her teeth. A thought came to him and he furrowed his brow a fraction, cocking his head to the side. Even if she was starving, she shouldn’t be moaning quite like that, and it had taken so little prodding before she had begun moving her head just the way he wanted. She was certainly a quick study. He grinned biting back a moan of his own as her tongue delved into his slit again and again as though she were chasing the pearly fluid to its source.

Lucius wasn't thinking with his brain. He wasn't really thinking at all. Rational thought had fled his mind at the sight of her lips wrapped around her thumb. There was only the perfection of the wet heat surrounding him.

The thought kept running through his head, that she wasn't supposed to be on her knees. He had only intended to push her until she balked.

She shouldn't be noisily slurping on his cock like a favored treat. She should have snatched her hand away as soon as he had placed it on his straining bulge. He would have laughed as she turned her head, embarrassed, and freed her from the chains.

He threw his head back and released a shuddering moan. Her tongue most certainly shouldn't have been doing that.

His eyes drifted closed, a small smile on his lips. She was certainly unpredictable. No, he thought, unpredictable was a sad, inadequate term to describe her. She was exquisite. He should stop. He should tear himself away. He should let her up, release her, feed her. Lucius looped her long hair around his hand, and the monster waking up inside him decided to push her just a little bit farther.

He was leaking steadily now and the more he gave her the more she wanted. With her eyes closed, she could almost imagine she was somewhere else, that Lucius Malfoy wasn’t a blood-supremacist, that he didn’t see her as a lesser being merely due to her parentage. Hermione shifted on her knees attempting to find a more comfortable position, whimpering slightly as the uneven stone dug into her flesh painfully.

She focused on other sensations instead and a delicious warmth that had started low in her belly began to spread throughout her entire body. He said something, but Hermione was too far into her own head to pay attention. Her skin felt flushed. The sensation was indescribable after the cold damp of the dungeon. She was jerked roughly from her blissful feeling with a shake of his fist coiled painfully in her hair.

“I said look at me!” he hissed dangerously as he pulled her mouth off his cock with a wet sound, fingers twisting viciously in her hair. Her eyes flew open at once, terrified at the sight that greeted her. His eyes blazed with barely-restrained anger. The rise and fall of his chest grew more pronounced with each passing moment. He was quickly moving from anger to something truly frightening and the aura of danger he was radiating now warned her to tread carefully.

“I’m sorry!” she gasped out. Hermione clutched at his trouser leg, willing him to believe her. She had never meant to anger.
He didn’t release her. “You claimed you wanted to please me.”

“I do! Please-” He cut off her words with another cruel shake.

His head canted to the side, sneering. “Having you imagine someone else in my place does not please me.” She must have looked guilty as he hit close to the truth because he continued in a mocking tone. “You think you’re the first woman to close her eyes and imagine a different partner?” She shook her head minutely, whimpering pitifully, barely able to move as he pulled at her hair, forcing her head backwards to expose the column of her throat. With his other hand, he caressed her face so tenderly as he stared into her eyes, that tears spilled onto her cheeks and Hermione shuddered from the duality of his touch.

When he spoke again, his voice was hard like stone, the tone a promise of exquisite punishment for disobedience. “You’ll keep your eyes open and on me.”

He gripped the base of his cock again and Hermione opened her mouth to accept him, but he chose instead to merely paint her full, swollen lips with the tip. Hermione didn’t dare move, not even to taste him as he amused himself.

“You’ll do this because it will please me that you know whose cock is satisfying your cravings. Lick me.” She did so without hesitation, swiping the flat of her tongue across the head, her eyes locked on his as she did so.

“You can hate me. I never said you couldn’t. Open your mouth. And watch the teeth this time.” He thrust back inside her mouth only now he held her still as he fucked her face. Lucius was far from gentle, but at least he didn’t go so deep that she couldn’t manage it.

“My cock arouses you. The taste of my seed arouses you.”

Hermione felt too warm and an insistent throbbing had set up shop between her legs, way down deep in the pit of her stomach. Was that what she felt? Arousal? If so, it was unlike anything she had felt before. She couldn’t move in his grasp, so she just clutched onto his thighs and did her best to not choke on the intrusion, hollowing her cheeks as she sucked, working to keep pace with his rhythm, and doing what she could to ensure her teeth remained covered.

His lips curved upward in amusement. “In fact, if I gave you the choice, you would want me to come in your mouth just so that you could savor the taste.”

His voice dropped to a whisper. “I think you’d beg for it.”

Hermione couldn’t stop the moan that thought elicited and she no longer cared that Lucius Malfoy was treating her like a whore, as a thing to use. His words and actions combined to awaken a need deep inside of her that she hadn’t known existed. She was ashamed of the way her body responded to his unwanted attentions, afraid to admit that if he wanted her to, she would beg.

Merlin, what does that say about me? That I would beg him to do this to me? Hermione pushed those thoughts from her mind, and scooted closer to him with a whimper.

Her hands roved up over his hips of their own accord, finding their way underneath the hem of his shirt as he used her mouth. The muscles of his abdomen rippled beneath her fingertips and she idly wondered what he looked like without his clothes on. She allowed one hand to slide back down, through the patch of short hair, and gripped his balls firmly, fondling them exactly as he had instructed earlier. He loosened his grip slightly, allowing her to move again, and she concentrated on the singular task of making him come in her mouth.
It seemed like forever before he began thrusting in a haphazard rhythm that she now recognized. *Not a moment too soon*, Hermione thought to herself, as a deep ache settled in her jaw. She made sure to keep her eyes on him, but he was no longer looking at her. His head was thrown back, mouth open slightly, and a light sheen of sweat caused some of his silken hair to stick to his neck. With a final groan, Lucius pulled back until only the head of his cock remained engulfed and he emptied into her waiting mouth, seed splashing hot on her tongue.

It was nothing like drinking from the goblet. Lucius had carefully tipped it over her lips so as not to choke her as it slid smoothly down her throat, so she was unprepared for the heartbeat stutter and the force as it pulsed directly from the source. She did her best to swallow it all but there was so much. Some of the precious fluid escaped the corner of her mouth, sliding down her face to drip off her chin. She continued to lick and suck him until he had finished and when he finally looked at her again she released him from her mouth. Bending down, she began to lap at the come staining his expensive dragonhide leather shoe as he tucked his softened cock away and buttoned his trousers.

When she finished, he pulled her to him and kissed her. It wasn’t anything like the few kisses she’d shared with Victor. Those kisses had been tender and sweet. This one was bruising and possessive but somehow, she found she preferred it and tentatively kissed him back feeling helpless to do otherwise. He pulled her body flush against him as his tongue explored her mouth, heedless of what that mouth had just been doing. The most intimate part of him pressed, though it thankfully lay dormant, against her lower belly. Lucius smiled as he broke the kiss but there was no smirk in it this time as he sank to one knee, reaching for the first ankle restraint.
Lucius had carried her up the stairs like a child after slipping his jacket over her trembling shoulders. Hermione had been weak enough that she hadn’t protested, and only clutched it more tightly around herself. When the final restraints had been removed from her ankles, she had found herself unable to stand on her own. Lucius’s powerful arms had been welcome, and Hermione did not feel like dwelling on that thought as she clung to him, her face buried in his neck. Lucius’ footfalls echoed dully on the highly-polished marble floors. There was marble, and velvet, and fur, and gold, and silver everywhere she looked, and she shuddered to think of how much it was all worth as she took in her surroundings. **Bloody hell! No wonder the Malfoys manage to get away with everything. There’s no telling how many ministry officials are in his pocket.**

He placed her into a chair at his mahogany dining table and sat down in his own chair at the head. Lucius relaxed into the plush leather and began to sort through several letters a trembling house-elf presented to him on a silver tray. Another house-elf appeared at her elbow with a bowl of broth and glass of water. Hermione longed for something more substantial, but she knew it was best to start slow and the broth did smell amazing. The first bite was divine and much heartier than she had expected. The flavors burst on her tongue like a symphony and she moaned uncontrollably at the sheer delight. She ignored Lucius and dug into her meal.

“Did you hear me, Miss Granger?” he asked, voice unexpectedly gentle.

Hermione startled suddenly, surprised to see that Lucius was no longer sitting in his chair. He was standing at her elbow looking down at her quizzically. Unconsciously, she shielded her bowl with an arm to protect it in case he decided to take it from her.

A small smile tugged at the corner of his mouth. “Apparently not. I have business to attend to.”

It was then that Hermione noticed the letter he clutched in his hand, but she couldn’t make out who it was from or what it said.

“While I’m away, my servants will tend to your needs. They’ll prepare a bath when you’ve finished your meal. After the last few days, I’m sure you'd like to refresh yourself.” She scowled darkly, which he ignored.

“I should warn you that my servants are under strict orders to keep you away from any exits.” She had deduced as much already and nodded mutely in acknowledgement. Hermione watched him stride from the room but quickly returned to her meal. Whatever business he was attending to had nothing to do with her anyway.

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“You’re late.” The hooded man glanced around furtively, clearly expecting to be caught in the act, ambushed by assailants even in this remote location. Lucius was used to the other man’s behavior, but it still grated on his nerves. It wasn’t as if Lucius had ever given him reason to doubt his caution. The meeting place had been chosen carefully. No one would interrupt them. It was an excellent spot to conduct clandestine business and it had the added benefit of also proving useful if the other man turned out to be a liability. Somehow, Lucius didn’t think that particular bit of information would bring any comfort to his anxious associate.
“You aren’t the only pawn I have in play.” Habit and a strong sense of self-preservation led him to
ward the room anyway, just in case. He hadn’t made it through the war intact by being sloppy and
he wasn’t about to start now. The stakes were too high. “I hope this visit means you finally have
something for me.”

“Not yet, sir.” The man held up his hands quickly in a placating gesture. “But I’m closing in on it! I
just don’t have the funds to confirm it.”

Lucius bit back his rage, and favored the other man with a tight, forced smile. His associate was
lucky that he had such a good record of dealings with Lucius in the past. Without such, Lucius
might have decided that he was being played for a fool. Still, his patience extended only so far. He
stepped forward and thumped him on the chest with the head of his cane. It made a satisfying thud
and even beneath the shadowed hood of the man’s cloak, Lucius could see and feel the man’s fear
as it radiated from him.

“You will have something the next time you contact me.” The threat of would happen otherwise
remained unstated. There was no need to voice it. Lucius’ reputation was well deserved.

He pulled a bag of coins from beneath his robes and tossed it on the floor of the broken down
shack, watching dismissively as the bag spilled open, and the coins clinked noisily to settle in the
dust.

The other man was still struggling to collect the fallen coins, pawing through the dust at his feet,
when Lucius slammed the door closed behind him. He might just be required to use the shack for
its alternate purpose if the fool didn’t deliver.

Hermione had concluded that the enormous, claw-foot bathtub was enchanted. It had kept the
water temperature perfect, and she had been relaxing in the bath long enough to begin pruning. The
water was as hot as she could stand it, and her skin glowed pink from the heat. She had thought she
would never warm up at first, but it hadn’t been long before the cold was a distant memory. The
master bath was lavishly appointed, spa-like, and if she didn’t think about what lay beyond the
closed double doors to her right she could believe that it was just a luxurious spa and she wasn’t a
prisoner here.

The sound of boots and the thud of a heavy cane on carpeted hardwood dispelled that fantasy. He
was back and he was coming closer. Hermione sank down into the water a bit further, crossing her
arms over her chest, waiting for him to appear. All too soon the ornate door knob turned and the
door swung open and Lucius was framed in the doorway, the light from the sitting room creating a
halo around him and reality firmly pushed all traces of the fantasy away.

“Enjoying yourself?” he inquired lightly with a slight tilt of his head.

I had been, Hermione thought sullenly. “Yes,” she replied instead.

“Good.” He entered the room, letting his cane click on the tile with each step he took. Stopping
near the middle of the large tub, Lucius bent down to trail a hand through the water, causing
ripples to bloom on the surface. He smiled softly. “It’s quite lovely, isn’t it?”

“It’s lovely,” she quietly agreed in a tremulous voice. Was he planning to climb in with her?
Hermione definitely wasn’t prepared for a naked Lucius Malfoy. Yes, she had just… sucked him
off, but he had been mostly clothed. She wasn’t ready for what a naked Lucius Malfoy implied,
even if she had made the offer. She had hoped that he wouldn’t actually follow through.
Lucius pulled back his sleeve, dipped his hand beneath the water’s surface, and drew her hand out, inspecting it carefully. “But far past time for you to get out.” He straightened, pulling her hand along with him so that she was forced to stand. Water sluiced from her body, steam rising in great curling tendrils as it quickly evaporated. He helped her out of the water, and pulled her along after him.

Hermione realized belatedly that he was heading for the closed double doors. She began to tremble and it wasn't from the cool air. She knew what lay beyond, had closed those doors so she didn’t have to see or think about it. Now, he threw them wide open and drew her into the room behind him as the wall sconces flared to life. Hermione followed meekly.

The room smelled like him. Now that she was inside, and it was properly lit, she could see that there were no feminine touches to be found. Lucius and his wife clearly did not share space. That had not been a lie. Then there was no more time to inspect the room. He was propelling her along toward the giant four-poster bed in front of her. It was huge; could have easily slept four people. Surprisingly the bedding was a dark indigo blue. Not Slytherin green, she thought distractedly. He turned her so that her back faced the giant bed, tossing his cane nonchalantly onto a nearby chair. This is it, Hermione thought. It’s happening, and she was certain that she wasn’t ready. She had always imagined her first time would be romantic and more importantly, with someone she loved.

"Are you ready for your reward?" he inquired, enigmatically. His thumbs moved in small circles at her waist and he stared at her with hunger in his eyes.

Hermione wanted to scream at him, to tell him exactly how sick he was if he thought that what he was going to do to her constituted any type of reward. She knew that wasn't what he wanted to hear, so instead she replied in a measured voice, “Yes. I’d like my reward.”

Lucius kissed her the same way he had earlier. It was deep and possessive as he held her against him. It told her in no uncertain terms that she was his, that he would do with her what he wanted, and it left her gasping for air. He pushed her down onto the bed gently, in stark contrast to his kiss. His voice was low but it left no room for argument, “Move back,” and he reached for the snake clasp of his cloak.

Hermione did as commanded, watching as he removed his robes and threw them onto the chair. His suit jacket and waistcoat followed. Next, he loosened his cuffs and rolled up his sleeves, toeing off his shoes at the same time. All of this, he did with no sense of urgency, his eyes roving over her the entire time. His heated scrutiny caused her to unconsciously press her knees together, but she resisted the urge to cover herself, and remained leaning on her elbows. They were well beyond the point where it mattered.

The bed dipped, and Hermione’s stomach dropped as he gently pushed her legs apart, and suddenly she collapsed onto the mattress, no longer capable of supporting herself. She allowed him to part her legs without resistance and he crawled toward her, resting on his knees between her own. Hermione turned her head to the side, mortified at the way he licked his lower lip and gazed possessively between her spread thighs, stroking up the insides lightly. She swiped angrily at an unexpected tear when his thumbs grazed very close to her entrance, as he parted her labia for his appraisal.

He paused, growing quite still, and Hermione knew he was staring at her. Her lower lip trembled and her breathing picked up, quickly growing rapid and shallow. She wished he would just get on with it, or better yet, leave. The waiting was killing her.

Lucius stroked his hand firmly over her hip, up over her ribs, just barely skimming the side of her breast until he reached her face, caressing her jaw. At the same time, his other hand landed on the
bed beside her head as he propped himself above her. The mark on his forearm was clearly visible in her field of view, reminding her of what he was, as if she could forget. She trembled, pressed so intimately against him, the large bulge in his trousers rubbing insistently between them.

He turned her head to face him, away from the mark, holding her gaze evenly, and there was something in his eyes she couldn't place. Lucius’ silken hair fell around her in waves, cloaking her in his scent, and closing off everything around them. He turned her head to the side again, catching her earlobe between his teeth, before suckling at it tenderly. She felt him shudder as the action evoked a whimper from her.

His fingers on her cheek loosened their hold, guiding her movement this time rather than demanding as he met her gaze once again. His face was inches from her own. “Relax. I don’t plan on fucking you today.”

Hermione thought she must have given him an incredulous look because he chuckled lightly and continued, “At least, not the way you think. Don’t mistake me. I’d like to, you have no idea how much, but I did promise a suitable reward, and it doesn’t seem like you’re all that keen on having my cock inside you.”

He kissed her, sweetly this time, with none of the possessiveness he’d demonstrated earlier. Despite her apprehension, which was currently dwindling under his sudden and unexpectedly tender touches, Hermione relaxed a little, wondering what exactly he was talking about. Not the way you think… What did that even mean?

As the kiss continued, his hand wandered back down her body to rest just above her knee, pausing momentarily before working its way back up her inner thigh, until he finally rested his palm against the mound of flesh at the juncture of her thighs. She gasped, startled at his touch when his fingers curled against her.

He shushed her, murmuring against her lips between kisses, “It’s okay. Just relax. I’m only returning the favor. I guarantee you’ll enjoy it.” He ground his palm against her firmly while his fingers began teasing open her outer lips. Lucius probed there experimentally for a moment before removing his hand entirely.

He broke the kiss long enough to lick the tips of his fingers, coating them in saliva and then captured her lips again before his hand returned to stroke between her legs. His slicked fingertips stroked gently in circular patterns until she finally relaxed for him, seemingly against her will. Only her hands had ever been where his now were, and she gasped as he caught her clit, pinching lightly until she cried out, hands fisted in the bed sheets.

He deepened the kiss when she opened her mouth, plunging his tongue inside. Lucius spread her labia apart, continuing to rub and stroke her clitoris, alternatively pressing hard against the nub and feathering light touches that danced around it. A single finger teased its way inside, and she let out an undignified moan as it moved inside her easily, slick with her growing arousal. This turn of events was unexpected but it felt so good she didn't want it to stop.

Caught up in the pleasure of his touch, his beliefs didn’t matter to her at the moment. That he was her captor and she was his prisoner didn’t matter at the moment. All that mattered to her was how good his hand felt between her legs. Her own, rather clumsy, self-explorations hadn’t aroused her nearly as quickly. He halted his movements and broke the kiss, pulling back to gaze at her, eyes dark with desire. Lucius was panting slightly while Hermione’s chest was already heaving.

“Just a taste of what I’m offering,” he whispered with a smile. “Now, we could stop if you wanted.” She shook her head emphatically. “Or I could continue?”
“Godric, yes.” It came out way too needy to her own ears, but Hermione didn’t care. She just wanted his hand moving again; wanted him to finish what he had started.

“I much prefer that answer,” he whispered. His lips moved across her jaw to her ear and began a torturous journey down her neck. He moved his hand away from between her legs again, eliciting a whimper of disappointment. Hermione watched as that hand found its way to her left breast and he squeezed gently, yet firmly, kneading the tender flesh there. At nearly the same time, his lips finished the journey down her throat and closed around the nipple of her right breast.

She sighed at the contact, feeling a rush of wetness between her legs, and for the first time since he had joined her on the bed, she touched him. Her fingers wound in his hair, holding his head to her, not that he seemed to be going anywhere. He sucked her nipple into his mouth, biting down and then soothing the peaked flesh with the flat of his tongue, lavishing attention on her as her back arched off the bed, seeking more. Her skin grew heated, her clit throbbed, and she could feel herself grow wetter with each swipe and swirl of his tongue.

With a last nip and lick, Lucius turned his attention to her other breast, giving it the same attention that he had lavished on the first. By the time he finished with both, they were an angry red and wet from the suction of his mouth, littered with tiny crescent bite marks from his teeth. Hermione squirmed beneath him, beyond ready for him to continue caressing her clit the way he had earlier.

He kissed and licked a path down her sternum and over her stomach, nipping at her with a low growl. Is he really going to-, but Hermione stopped thinking as his tongue swiped across her clit, his lips closing around the bud, and he began to suck softly. With a breathy moan, Hermione closed her eyes, her head falling back onto the pillow. She couldn’t believe this was what he’d had in mind.

Once more, Lucius nudged her legs apart from where she had unconsciously tried to wrap them around him as she writhed, fingers in his hair, attempting to press his face more insistently against her. This time, Hermione spread them willingly in response to his gentle urging as he parted her, pressing his tongue against her more forcefully. She bucked against him, forcing him to hold her still when his teeth scraped across the sensitive bundle of nerves. When she had stilled once again, he circled a finger around her entrance before pressing it inside her slowly.

She cried out as he began thrusting his finger in and out of her slick channel, setting a leisurely rhythm that matched pace with the tongue now lapping at her clit. Before long he added a second finger, twisting and curling them against her inner walls. Feeling her orgasm building, Hermione instinctively covered her mouth to muffle her scream.

Just before that rush of ecstasy hit her, his mouth and hand abruptly stopped moving. Hermione screamed in frustration and opened her eyes to see him staring at her from between her legs. His hair was wonderfully disheveled, his eyes dark and hooded, and the lower half of his face glistened. He was slightly breathless as he stared at her, tongue darting out to lick at his lips. It was quite the beautiful sight but far from what she needed.

“Why the bloody hell did you stop!? I was almost there!” She was livid, frustrated at being so close and then being denied, but he didn’t seem to notice. He quirked an eyebrow at her and tilted his head thoughtfully to inspect the part of her he’d just vacated. The fingers still inside her twisted experimentally and Hermione’s breath hitched.

“Oh no,” he said, licking his lips, “No, you aren’t nearly wet enough for me to let you come yet.” He smirked when her muscles clenched involuntarily around his digits and she moaned. “I haven’t even had the chance to properly taste you.” He pumped his fingers slowly, torturously, in and out, smirking at her the entire time. “Now, since you haven’t managed to drown me with your cunt yet,
clearly I’m doing a terrible job.”

“You’ve got to be fucking kidding me,” Hermione muttered under her breath.

A sharp twist and a cruel crook of his fingers, “What was that?”

Hermione bit back a moan. “Nothing,” she whimpered. He nodded sagely, and Hermione felt like slapping him for it. When he removed his fingers, she felt like sobbing.

“Lift up,” he ordered with a sly grin, the fingers so recently teasing her, landing lightly on the back of her thigh. She readily obliged as he stuffed a pillow beneath her hips. It was a relief when his hand returned, fingers sliding back inside.

His voice lowered seductively, his hand never ceasing its slow, cruel torment. “Now, I’m going to start over, and if you cover your mouth again, I will stop. This ends with you screaming my name and your attempt to suffocate me with your pussy as it gushes over my tongue. In order to get to that point, you’d best provide instruction, so I can be assured the job is done properly.”

A thrill of sudden desire shot through her at his words, but Hermione hesitated. She bit her lip, a small frown creasing her brow, and asked him softly, “You actually enjoy this?” After all she’d overheard in the common room, it was unthinkable.

He removed the fingers he’d been teasing her with and placed his hands on her thighs staring into her eyes as he did so. His gaze dropped to her exposed pussy and Hermione was shocked to see it turn downright worshipful. “Absolutely,” he whispered parting her outer lips with his thumbs and stroking his hands over her inner thighs reverently. He dipped lower, breathing in the scent of her arousal. “Only a fool would turn down such a tasty morsel.” And he bent his head to taste her once again, licking slowly along the length of her.

He opened his mouth wide, covering her entirely from the top of her clit all the way to the lower end of her entrance, gently suckling at the entire area. She bucked against him with a groan, but he held her down, suckling with steady, even pressure and began licking her slowly again. On every upward stroke of his tongue, he dipped shallowly into her entrance, swiping upwards before circling her clit lazily. Each time he did it, his tongue dipped inside a little farther.

He had her mewling incoherently when he switched his attention to her inner thighs. He spent a long time licking and kissing her there. Gradually, Hermione came to her senses enough to realize he was lingering, not giving her what she truly wanted.

“Please,” she whimpered, attempting to guide his mouth back to her clit. He refused to budge.

“I told you,” he nipped her thigh, “to instruct me.”

“I want your mouth on me,” she whined in frustration.

“It is.” She could feel him grinning against her.

“Not like that,” she moaned, breathlessly.

“Then how?” he teased.

Hermione fought hard to think through the haze of lust clouding her mind. What did she want from him? Would he do whatever she asked?

She made her decision quickly as she felt him drifting farther down her thigh. “Suck on my clit like
you did before,” and she mewled in satisfaction as his mouth sought out her clitoris without hesitation.

Ordering him to do what she wanted grew easier each time, and his eager compliance with every demand only served to turn her on even more. Soon, she was writhing against him uncontrollably. She was so close, but she wasn’t quite there yet, frustration beginning to set in as she frantically tried to figure out what she needed, what would push her over the edge. Then she remembered the way he had licked her previously, that agile muscle moving inside her, and she knew what she wanted.

“I want you to use your tongue inside me,” she whispered urgently, “like you did with your fingers.”

He growled softly against her sending a jolt straight through her. “You want me to fuck you with my tongue?” but he made no move to comply with her request.

“Yes,” her answer was breathy.

His eyes flicked upwards. He met her gaze, giving her clit a final lick before he spoke, eyes smoldering through a curtain of silken hair, “Then tell me that’s what you want.”

She didn’t look away and only hesitated slightly. “Please, Lucius,” he inhaled sharply as she said his name, “I want- I want you to fuck me with your tongue.”

He wasted no time granting her wish, plunging his tongue inside.

“Oh fuck,” she moaned as the slick muscle squirmed about, delving within her maddeningly. Lucius’ eyes drifted closed as he feasted on her, slitting open at times to watch her reactions. Hermione fisted her hands in his hair, holding his mouth to her.

It was when he added his fingers, and began licking her clit again, that Hermione lost control. She was grinding against his face and without warning, his name was on her lips as her entire body stiffened, back arching off the bed, before finally relaxing, boneless and sated.

She shuddered from the pleasurable aftershocks as he tenderly licked her clean. He sat up slowly with a satisfied sigh and she looked at him. He looked… sated. No other word quite fit. His eyes had a faraway look in them, and there was a satisfied tilt at the corner of his mouth. His chin was practically dripping this time. Lucius licked his lips sensually, swiped his palm across his face, looked at his hand, and then licked it clean too. His other hand, he ran through his long, dishevelled hair attempting to smooth it back out. He shook himself from his stupor, and his eyes inevitably refocused on her.

“I hope you enjoyed that,” he said sincerely, panting lightly as he caught his breath.

Hermione could only nod as she sighed, dreamily, a slow smile creeping across her face.

“Good,” he shifted away from her uncomfortably. “If you’ll excuse me, I have something I need to take care of.”

Hermione’s gaze dropped to his crotch, and she could see what he was referring to as he moved to get up, presumably to make his way to the adjoining master bathroom.

She sat up quickly, surprising herself and placed a tentative hand on his arm to halt him. “I could-” but he cut her off.
“I don’t require it. That was for you. Mostly. Right now, unless it’s something you want-” he stopped suddenly as she reached for the buttons of his fly.

“It is what I want,” and as she said the words, it shocked her to realize they were true. She did want to taste him again. It didn’t make sense, but somehow it felt right. As she unbuttoned his trousers, she decided ‘why’ was something to push to the back of her mind and think about later.

Chapter End Notes

I had planned to upload this chapter over the weekend, but sudden inspiration struck and I’ve now started work on part two of "A Perfect Pet”. Hope you guys like this installment!
Lucius finished entering the last of the day’s detailed notes in his ledger, taking care to include the exact number of galleons he had given his shady associate earlier. One day, many years from now, he would be able to look back and see just how much this particular endeavor had cost him. He could only hope the cost would only be measured in golden galleons and favors, painstakingly entered into his ledger, and that his life or the lives of his family would not also be counted amongst them at the end.

He replaced the ledger in his hidden wall safe, and poured himself a hefty glass of brandy. Lucius stared out the massive windows of his study, noting absently the sinking sun already low in the sky, and sipped at his drink. The sky itself appeared to be threatening snowfall, in the same way a dog, with no intention of biting, threatens.

Lucius pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed aloud. He knew he was jeopardizing his mission, idiotically so. He’d taken things too far with the girl, he knew he had and yet, for some unfathomable reason, he couldn’t seem to control himself. True, Malfoys didn’t typically exercise much restraint, but neither did they make stupid, costly mistakes. He might have thrown away years of careful planning, simply by not exercising a little restraint.

After returning from his meeting, he had had every intention of getting back to business, to the heart of why she was there to begin with. Unfortunately, he had arrived back home at exactly the wrong moment. The sight of her trembling in the bath despite the steam rising from the water, and the memory of her on her knees, staring up at him had called to the darkest part of his nature, the part that had been carefully cultivated. The thought that his bed was so close at hand had been his undoing.

That darkness was something he didn’t particularly like, but it was a part of him now he had found difficult to kill. Those foreign urges were something he had struggled to bury down deep inside, and after the Dark Lord’s downfall, he had thought he had.

Nearly ten years without a single slip up, and for a moment, just one fleeting moment, as he had spread her legs apart for the first time, and spied the fear that flashed across her face, he had considered just taking her. It sickened him to realize just how close he had come. The line between acceptable and not had become hopelessly blurred during the Dark Lord's rise to power, but that
had remained the one line he had refused to cross. The likes of the Carrows and the Lestranges were the type to find that sort of behavior arousing. Not him. His interests lie elsewhere.

Yes, fear excited him. Lucius hated that it did. It hadn't always, but it had been ingrained into him, encouraged for far too long. He had done terrible things during the war, chasing the high it brought him, but he didn’t blame himself for that. No, that blame lay with his father, and his Dark Lord.

He couldn’t blame them for his behavior towards the girl since her arrival, though. Not entirely. His father was long dead, and even as the Dark Lord regained his strength, for now he was still little more than a spectre wrapped in flesh. Even if they had lain the groundwork, what he had done to her was all on him, and if he were being honest with himself, his behavior over the last several days was just as disgusting, as reprehensible, but he rationalized it because the alternative turned his stomach. He told himself that terrorizing her in his dungeon was nothing compared with what he had nearly done to her in his bed.

Lucius slammed his fist against the glass, baring his teeth in a sudden snarl of rage, the reinforced pane echoing with the force of his blow. That part of him should have been buried. Why was it surfacing now!?

Lucius sighed again, scrubbing a hand over his face. It didn’t matter now. He hadn't done it. He hadn't crossed that line. The thought had been dismissed nearly the instant it had entered his mind. Indulging in the dungeon, uncaging that monster living inside him, even if only for a short while, had clearly been a mistake. He had known it was too dangerous to set free. If he hadn’t backed off in time, giving rather than taking… He laughed mirthlessly, raising his glass to his lips. He could have just stopped altogether. He should have done so. Maybe his father had right about him all along.

The memory of his darkest desires being found out, of the savage beating that followed, for having them, indulging in them, came back to him unbidden as he looked out the window surveying the grounds. His father’s voice echoed in his head, screaming at him, telling him that he was a monster, that he couldn't possibly be a Malfoy, that there was something wrong with him. All those long years ago, sobbing, still half-hard beneath his father’s belt, he had believed it. After what he had almost done, he half believed it now.

Lucius couldn’t even remember his lover’s name. He was just some half-blood, two years his senior and enamored enough with him to indulge in his proclivities, but he could recall the ghost of his father’s belt easily. A *Cruciatus* curse, no matter how intensely delivered, left no marks, so he had used the belt. He had used it specifically so that Lucius could see the evidence of the shame his behavior brought to his family. Unfortunately for his father, the result of that lesson hadn’t been what the elder Malfoy had in mind, and afterwards, Lucius had studied his reflection, catalogued each mark, and committed the image to memory.

Abraxas Malfoy hadn’t had an issue with his only son bedding a half-blood, not even a half-blood male. The occasional addition of a half-blood had kept the family strong, unlike some of the more unfortunate pure-blood families, and so long as Lucius produced a suitable heir, his dalliances could be overlooked.

No, Abraxas Malfoy’s issue had lain solely with what he had caught them doing. It had been entirely consensual, and Abraxas had cared not one whit. Lucius had never understood how rape and murder were apparently acceptable in his father's eyes, but his perversions were a step too far. Somehow, he didn't think he would ever understand it.

Lucius hadn’t turned from those perversions as his father had intended. It wasn’t something he was willing to give up. He had accepted what he was and embraced that part of himself and had hidden
it away, lest it be taken from him. Young Lucius Malfoy had catalogued each mark on his body to remind himself of what would happen if he got caught again, and became ever more deceptive, more discreet. He had sworn to himself that even if he were a monster, he would never lose control, never disgrace the family name, and thus prove his father wrong.

Only now, in a split second, he had nearly confirmed those accusations. He topped off his drink, and returned to his desk, unable to fathom how he could have reacted so strongly to a such a slip of a girl. She was barely even a woman, still waifish and gangly, her body still on the cusp of maturity. None of which changed the fact that he wanted her.

And perhaps therein lie the answer. Perhaps it was because he wanted her. He had never wanted any of the others during the war. None of the Dark Lord’s gifts had made him want to cross that self imposed line. He had gotten what he wanted from them, and had never had the urge, but she was different. Even now, he wanted nothing more than to return to her.

Perhaps it had just been too long since he had let the monster play. It hadn’t become dangerous until the Dark Lord had sank his claws into him and whispered in his ear. He couldn’t even remember the last time he had played with a willing partner. Lucius didn’t know if he even could now. He didn’t even know how to go about testing if it was safe.

Restoring the family name after the war had its drawbacks. What tended to be good for the estate coffers tended to be bad for his deviant sex life. The more firmly he reestablished the Malfoy name within the upper echelon of wizarding society, the harder it became to maintain discretion. There weren’t many people willing to engage in his particular perversions to begin with, even with incentives. Not only that, but he still feared letting it out. He had not even attempted since that slip up ten years prior, when he had learned just how badly the Dark Lord had twisted and perverted his soul. Lucius had once thought the Dark Lord had given him everything he had ever wanted, only to realize that he had managed something his father had not. He had made him fear a part of himself he had once held dear.

Pushing his troubling thoughts away, Lucius reached for the stack of letters neatly arranged on the silver tray that served as his inbox. He vowed to distance himself from the girl, and keep that part of himself locked safely away.

If he hadn’t already bungled things beyond repair, he would soon be working in close proximity with her, and he couldn’t risk hurting her. He resolved to concentrate fully on his mission before the window of opportunity closed. He had wasted far too much time already.

She had woken refreshed near sundown with the day’s last golden rays streaming in through the partially drawn silk curtains. Real sleep in a real bed had made her feel like a person again, but Hermione made no move to get up. She couldn’t face him. Not yet. Not before she figured out just what in Merlin’s name was going on with her.

Shamelessly begging for his tongue was one thing. She had been so close to her orgasm that could easily be explained. Wanting to take him in her mouth again, when she wasn’t insane with need… that was more difficult.

Maybe worst of all, she'd fallen asleep in his arms, and had lain awake, until her eyelids became too heavy, staring at his wand lying on the chair along with the clothing he had removed. It had been an opportunity, one she hadn’t taken. She’d lain there instead, admiring the craftsmanship, never once considering using it to escape. She’d merely slipped an arm beneath his shirt and nuzzled closer, inhaling his scent contentedly. When she’d woken, both the cane and its owner were gone.
Left to her thoughts, Hermione had to concede that her priority was no longer escape. Something strange was going on, and her instincts told her that she needed to investigate. She had cursed her curious nature, cursed her insatiable need to solve any mystery that presented itself. It was just too much for her to ignore.

Why did he kidnap her?

What did he want?

She still couldn't piece it together. And why did Lucius Malfoy, proclaimed muggle hater, appear to have no qualms about touching a *mudblood*? Intimately. He’d rather seemed to have enjoyed it.

Truthfully, she had enjoyed it too, at least some of it, and not just the parts that had taken place in his bed, but when she was on her knees in his dungeon… Her arousal flared again at the memory.

She could admit that she found him attractive, had for a while, and knew she wasn’t alone. Lucius Malfoy was the subject of common room gossip in more than just one of Hogwarts’ houses. His politics and beliefs were the issue, not his looks and certainly not his intelligence.

“What’s wrong with me?” she groaned, but the empty room held no reply for her. She knew it was twisted, that she should be outraged at the way he had forced himself on her, not turned on by his tender and incredibly expert ministrations. She was supposed to hate him for what he had done. Hermione had been terrified at the thought of Lucius putting his hands on her, until he had actually done it. After all, harmless gushing at school was one thing, the prospect of real physical intimacy was something else entirely.

Dungeon-Lucius had been expected; taking what he wanted through force. Bedroom-Lucius had been a surprise. His words had been coarse and filthy, and he had teased her mercilessly until she begged for him. He had known exactly how. She understood that he had still forced himself on her, but once she had realized what he was capable of, what she could learn from him, the pleasure he could give her, she had responded so eagerly.

Logically, Hermione understood that Lucius had, consciously or not, been priming certain responses from her over the last several days, but it still didn’t explain, in her mind, the strength of her reaction. It didn’t explain how readily she had begged for his touch nor how fondly she now recalled it. Whenever she had thought about sex previously, fumbling toward quiet orgasm beneath her bed sheets so as not to rouse her roommates, the fantasies fueling her release had been sweet and romantic, if a little vague. She still wanted that, but she couldn't deny that there was something powerful and primal in the way Lucius had both exercised and ceded control. She could blame her insatiable thirst for knowledge, but wasn’t truly convinced that was the answer.

Hermione sat up with a sigh and threw the covers off. She could pick apart her physical response to him another time. The more pressing concern was her presence at Malfoy Manor, and ruminating wasn’t going to provide the information she sought. If she wanted answers to that particular question she would need to go directly to the source.

Unexpectedly, she noticed the folded garment at the foot of the bed, and picked it up, a wonderfully soft dressing gown in a gorgeous grey, though clearly not sized for her small frame or the female frame in general. She put it on, belting it tightly about her waist. It swallowed her, but at least she was covered. Hermione squared her shoulders, mustering all the fabled Gryffindor courage she possessed, and went in search of her answers.

She located him in his massive study just down the hall, sitting behind his oversized desk, his quill scratching hastily across the parchment before him. Hermione hovered in the doorway for the
briefest of moments before striding fully into the room. It was well-appointed like the rest of the
manor, but this room was intimidating in a way the other rooms she had seen were not. The
enormity of it diminished Lucius not in the least. Where it might have dwarfed another, the study
seemed almost to be an extension of its master’s will. It made her feel incredibly small.

He had glanced up from his correspondence briefly at her approach, no less intimidating for his
casual attire, and Hermione suddenly felt nervous as that shot of Gryffindor bravery wavered. She
carried on, forcing herself to calmly sit in the chair across from him. He glanced at the clock on his
desk and then continued writing.

“My servants should have dinner ready shortly. You slept well I assume?” The coldness in his
voice shocked her after the warmth in his tone only hours previous. Somehow, she managed to
keep the surprise from showing, though just barely.

“Fine, thank you.” She soldiered on bravely. At least his cold demeanor made it easier to put the
memories aside, and focus on finding her answers, even if it did inexplicably hurt a bit. “I think it’s
past time you tell me why I’m here. Considering your hatred for muggleborns-”

“I never claimed to hate them,” he countered smoothly, interrupting her, and continuing with his
work.

“You’re not serious?” she asked, incredulous. His disdain was well-known.

Lucius maintained the ice in his voice, not bothering to even glance up as he delivered what
sounded to her ears to be a well-rehearsed retort. “Pure-blood wizards are simply superior. That is
all.”

Hermione shook her head. “You can’t still believe that. If you did, a muggle-born witch wouldn’t
be sitting at your desk right now.” Not to mention the rest of it, but she kept that thought to herself.

He narrowed his eyes a fraction as he set aside the parchment he currently worked on, and turned
his full attention toward her. “If you’re so sure of yourself, perhaps you should tell me why you
think you’re here.”

Now that the words were on the tip of her tongue, they sounded woefully inadequate, but she didn't
really have anything else. “I think you’re looking for something, or rather someone specific. I think
you want to see if that someone is me.”

His voice remained neutral, giving nothing away as he urged her, “Go on.”

Now that the words were on the tip of her tongue, they sounded woefully inadequate, but she didn't
really have anything else. “I think you’re looking for something, or rather someone specific. I think
you want to see if that someone is me.”

An amused smile quirked his lips for the first time since she had entered the room. “For what
reason?” Hermione was floored by his response, but took it as a sign that she was on the right path,
which only served to renew her confidence.

“Specifically? I couldn’t begin to guess. But it’s important enough to you that you were willing to
risk kidnapping me from Hogwarts in broad daylight. Yet you were careful enough to not get
caught. I didn’t miss the headlines in your morning paper. And perhaps, most importantly, you want it kept secret, possibly even from Voldemort himself. Why else would you go to such trouble?” She didn't know if she were asking him the question or herself.

“Are you saying it would have been easier to take you from your home?”

“Yes, it would have,” she stated, frowning. What kind of question was that? It was blatantly obvious it would have been easier. “Imperiusing two muggles and snatching me would have been much simpler,” she paused for a moment, coming to a sudden realization, “but then you wouldn’t have been able to demonstrate your capabilities. That was your audition. That was your way of proving that it would be worth my while to work with you.”

She met his gaze again.

He leaned back into his chair, studying her with an unreadable expression on his face, and at length softly said, “I think I chose correctly,” a hint of that earlier warmth returning.

“That is,” she added, unable to help herself, “if you’re not attempting to con me into trusting you right now. I know you’re manipulative and you’re an expert at playing the long game. You survived the war virtually unscathed. It would be foolish to trust you so easily, and if telling you all this seals my fate, then so be it, but I’m done with being underestimated.”

He continued staring at her, and Hermione hated that he was so unreadable. If it had been anyone else, her blunt statement would have elicited some kind of reaction. She envied that quality he had, knowing how easily he wielded it to make others squirm. “I’ve often thought you meddlesome and foolhardy perhaps, but never foolish. As for underestimating you, I’ve heard enough complaints levied your way to know better. That’s why you’re the one sitting at my desk right now. I have an offer for you, and my offer is sincere, but I don’t expect you to simply trust my word. You shall have the proof required to make that decision for yourself. It might not be tangible, but I believe, given what you’ve just demonstrated, it will be enough.”

“You are right,” he continued with a sly grin, “and you are wrong. This has everything to do with the Dark Lord.” Before she could press him further, the clock on his desk chimed. “Dinner awaits.”

Hermione had intended to continue pressing Lucius for information the moment they sat down, but his house elves had set an actual meal in front of her this time. It proved too tempting to resist. She dug into it, glancing over at Lucius as she stuffed her face. His manners were impeccable, in accordance with his aristocratic upbringing.

She was suddenly embarrassed at her appalling table manners. He didn’t appear to notice, though she wondered if that aristocratic upbringing meant he simply could not draw attention to her poor etiquette. In her defense, she was quite hungry, and it was his fault, though she did make more of an effort to be civilized.

“When you’ve finished, we’ll adjourn to the library. You haven't had a chance to explore it yet, I take.” He sipped at his cup of tea.

“Your elf mentioned it. I’m afraid the bath was more enticing at the time,” she answered haltingly.

Lucius nodded, an apologetic look gracing his fine features. “My behavior towards you has been appalling. That was not my intention. I never should have… treated you in such a way.”

“You mean chain me up naked in your dungeon?” Healthy skepticism was evident in her tone.
“Oh, no that was intentional,” he replied nonchalantly. “It heightens the fear, you see. I was playing a role after all, giving you what you expected. I had intended to tear you down and test you, to be certain you were the one. I hadn't intended to deviate from that script.” He cleared his throat and chuckled, casting a sidelong glance at her. “You were never actually meant to drink, you know.”

“Then why did you offer?”

He ran his finger around the rim of his teacup, clearly considering his response. The answer came out as a whisper. “I don't know. I don't like that I don't know, but I don't. Why did you accept?” he asked quietly. She had been afraid he would ask the question.

“You kind of backed me into a corner. I thought playing your game was my best option for getting out, that you might slip up.”

“That explains the first time. It doesn't explain why you continued when it became clear that I wouldn’t.”

“I can't blame the delirium?”

“Delerium only explains the dungeon.” She blushed at his enigmatic smile, recalling vividly what he hinted at, but offered no further excuses. She didn't have them yet.

“Anyway,” he continued, “in light of our forthcoming partnership, your personal effects shall be returned to you, and I shall refrain from any ungentlemanly conduct going forward.”

“Partnership?” she asked in confusion. Whatever she had been expecting, a partnership with Lucius Malfoy wasn't quite it. A partnership was quite a bit more than what she had been expecting.

“It is the reason you’re here.” He cleared his throat once more and began hesitantly. “Ah, this is more difficult than I thought it would be. I don’t- I find it difficult to trust people.”

“Really? How shocking. I never would have guessed,” Hermione deadpanned.

Lucius ignored the comment, speaking lowly, though the anger in his voice was unmistakable, “I am working on a project. As you deduced, it’s quite secretive. If the wrong parties get wind of it, I and my entire family are dead. So, to me, it’s no laughing matter.”

“S-sorry, please continue,” she stammered, taken aback by his confession.

Through great effort, his tone turned conversational again. “I’ve managed to rely on shady minions thus far, feeding them as little information as possible. They have their uses, but to finish what I started, I find that I do, in fact, need to trust someone. Therefore, I require the talents of someone intelligent enough to fully rely on.”

Her eyes widened in surprise. “I’m flattered, but what makes you think that someone is me?”

“Whether you realize it or not, despite your tender age, you rank highly within the Order of the Phoenix, or you will at the least, and this is not only due to your association with the Chosen One. You’re well studied. You know more about magic than anyone your age, and more than most beyond your years. You knew how to combat Devil’s Snare and solve Severus’ riddle as a first-year student, discovered, on your own, that you were hunting a basilisk.”

“That you released.”
“and were granted the use of a time-turner,” he finished. “All of which is quite impressive, and I’m sure that’s not even the half of it.”

“How did you know about that? That’s not in my file.” She narrowed her eyes suspiciously. Her involvement with the Order wasn’t a stretch for him to suspect by any means, but the time turner… only a handful of people knew about that.

He grinned, amused at her reaction. “Do you think you’re the first student to be deemed worthy of using one?”

“You?” Hermione realized just how badly she had underestimated the man delicately sipping from his teacup. She had long ago gathered that he was intelligent, but had never bothered to find out the extent, and had let her history with Draco color her perception of his father. That was clearly a mistake. Where Draco was flashy and obvious, Lucius was dangerous in the subtlest of ways; truly, the definition of a Slytherin.

Lucius smiled conspiratorially over the rim of his cup.

“You should have seen me as a student. I was practically considered a potions prodigy, until Severus came along, upstaging me.” He seemed particularly put out by that admission.

“The man is truly a master, though,” and admiration colored his voice.

“Your class schedule was rather telling for someone who has been through it. On top of all your exceptional academic qualifications, you’re cautious and discreet. When I inquired about spells, you stonewalled me, as you should have done. You told me about Flamel when I inquired after your reading habits which was exactly the kind of response I was looking for. That information is practically worthless at this point, and yet quite plausible. If you agree to this partnership, you’ll be privy to information that you can’t share with anyone. I won’t require you to swear an unbreakable vow, but I did consider it. Know that it is that serious.”

Hermione was certainly intrigued. Had he been counting on that? Had he known that if they made it this far she would almost certainly accept? Perhaps she was the one underestimating him. “Okay, then. What do you need my help with?”

He hesitated once more, still reluctant to say what he wanted. If he still didn’t trust her after all the unexpected praise he’d just lavished upon her… Hermione feared she might be getting in over her head, but that had never stopped her before.

She watched as he took a deep breath, steeled himself, and said, “Finish your meal, get changed, and I’ll provide you with a little light reading. Tell me, Miss Granger, have you by any chance, ever heard of a horcrux?”

Chapter End Notes

What was Lucius up to that Abraxas couldn't stomach? A word of warning, Abraxas does not get any nicer. I really don't think Lucius would have turned out the way he did if Abraxas was a good guy. And yes, Lucius is rationalizing his behavior and downplaying what he has actually been doing. This chapter is heavy on psychology, especially in the beginning. Thanks for reading!
That light reading had turned out to be three rather large books pertaining to the dark arts. Thankfully, the entirety of each book had not been devoted to the subject of horcruxes. Hermione pulled absently at the collar of her shirt as she flipped the page. True to his word, Lucius had given her back her things, only since she had worn nothing for so many days, the fabric scratched against her skin fiercely. She wondered what his robe had been made out of. It hadn't been scratchy at all.

She jotted down a note in the leatherbound journal he'd given her. The manor library was impressive though that word might have been an understatement. If she could, Hermione would gladly set herself up in it and only reemerge once she had exhausted every book in the room. There were even books that Hogwarts didn’t have. She knew because she had been looking for one certain book for a couple of years without luck, and it sat tantalizingly on the shelf nearby. It would have to wait though, because it wasn’t on her currently assigned reading list.

Lucius’ proof was rather tenuous, tangible only in that she already had direct experience with it, which might have been another deciding factor in his decision to recruit her. Someone else might not have believed him, but Harry’s testimony as to what had occurred in the chamber left her with little doubt regarding Lucius’ sincerity. The more she read, the more worried she became. Hermione was certain now that she was definitely in over her head. It was common knowledge that Voldemort was dangerous, was perhaps the most dangerous dark wizard who had ever existed. What she was reading about now was not common knowledge and it made things so much worse.

She looked up from her current book, Secrets of the Darkest Art, to Lucius leaning against the door frame, a glass of whiskey dangling precariously from his fingertips, and his snake-headed cane grasped casually in the opposite hand. He had left her to her books, returning to his study to finish his correspondence, and had apparently just returned. His body language was relaxed, and his expression appeared neutral, apart from the intensity burning in his grey eyes.

“Tom Riddle’s diary was a horcrux,” she stated without preamble. Lucius simply nodded. “How many does he have?”

He pushed off the door frame, entering the room, and stood at her shoulder, glancing down at the notes she had made. “I don’t know. I suspect, for obvious reasons, the Dark Lord is the only one who does.”

Hermione nodded absently, absorbing this information, her eyes falling to the glass in his hand. “I think I might need one of those.”

Lucius raised an eyebrow, and moved over to the bar to pour a glass for her, and top off his own as well. He glanced over at her as he began to pour. “I thought I would have to work to earn your trust. Especially considering, well everything I suppose.”

“When you put everything together, it makes sense. Besides, I’m probably the last person you’d
He handed her drink over with a look that seemed to question whether she could handle it, but then merely took a seat in the chair across from her, propping his cane against the outer edge of the chair’s armrest. Her eyes were involuntarily drawn to it. Ever since that first time in Flourish and Blotts, she had always wondered…

“Before we get started, I wanted to ask you something. Why do carry it?” She gestured in the cane’s general direction with her glass.

“Well it chose me, just as yours chose you,” he answered with a grin, seemingly amused by the question.

“Yes, the wand does the choosing. I know. I meant the cane specifically, not the wand. You don’t require its use, and your wand isn’t exactly hidden. In fact, most people know what it is. It seems, I don’t know, like a disadvantage.”

“Well, at first I didn’t. I was eleven though, and it may have been as tall as me. A bit too awkward carting that around. But by fourteen or fifteen I was nearly tall enough, I’d learned how to handle it, and I couldn’t resist the benefit.”

“Which was?” she asked, her brows knitted together in interest.

Lucius quirked an eyebrow at her, calmly reached for his cane without saying anything, and looked at it for a moment before turning back to her. He unsheathed the wand easily, and held it aloft with a dramatic flourish before returning it to its housing.

“Consider for a moment that you’re my enemy. Somehow you’ve captured me.” Without warning, the cane came flying at her head.

Hermione nearly dropped her drink in her rush to catch it before it smacked her across the face. “You’ve gotten the drop on me and disarmed me and now my wand is yours.”

She set her glass on the small table next to her, and drew Lucius’ wand, only it must have been stuck. She tried twisting it. It didn’t budge. “Or so you thought. Only I can draw it. The cane itself is also enchanted with a minor shield spell. It’s handy in a fight. Besides, if I carry the cane, my wand is always at hand.”

Hermione tossed it back, and Lucius caught it deftly with a twirl before returning it to its resting place, a move that clearly demonstrated his familiarity with the item in question. “That doesn’t seem like something Ollivander’s would offer.”

He shook his head. “Not ordinarily and not anymore. It’s been in the family for centuries. The last time it chose a wizard was more than 400 years ago.” He chuckled lightly. “I always wondered if it had a preference. We shared a name if I remember correctly.”

“You aren't going to let me inspect it, are you?” she asked.

“No, why would I allow that? It’s elm. Eighteen inches. Dragon heartstring. What more do you need to know?” Lucius sipped from his glass.

“Dragon heartstring?” she echoed.

He smiled. “Yes, exactly like yours. I have a feeling my wand would respond quite well to you, if you ever managed to pry it away from me. All the more reason to see to it that doesn't happen.”
“Speaking of my wand…”

“Oh, I’m not giving it back to you yet. You can have it back when you leave. Now shall we focus on the task at hand?”

“By all means,” she sighed with mock exasperation and a roll of her eyes. Really, she had known better than to believe she would be getting her wand back, but she had to at least try. “How did you know what the diary was? Did Voldemort tell you?”

“No. The Dark Lord is-”

“And why do you keep saying that?” she cut in. “You claim you’re trying to take him down, and yet you’re still afraid to say his name?”

His eyes narrowed, his tone turning dark. “I am still playing a role. Pretending to be a good little soldier. The Dark Lord is even less trusting than I, and he is an accomplished Legilimens. I’m not such an idiot that I would let a slip of the tongue sign my death warrant.”

Hermione quickly put up her hands in a placating gesture before the conversation could go any further off the rails. “I understand. It makes sense. So, tell me about the diary then.”

He continued to glare at her for a moment before speaking. “It was entrusted to me before his disappearance, for my faithful service.”

The way he said it, and the rueful smirk made her think he might elaborate, but Lucius merely shook his head as if clearing the surfaced memories and continued. “I had no idea what it was, not for a long time. There are actually, believe it or not, entire areas of dark magic I am not versed in. This is one of them. It sat in my vault at Gringott’s untouched, but after his downfall, I could feel the dark power radiating off it from time to time when I set foot in there. It was almost like it was calling to me.”

Lucius sighed, sipping at his drink. “There were always rumors that he was never truly gone, and then there were whispers that he was back. I began to suspect what it was shortly before the end of your first year, and set in motion the events needed to confirm it.”

“So, slipping Ginny the diary… that was just a test?” Hermione asked, fury in her voice. How could he be so unconcerned about playing with people’s lives so callously? “She was a child!”

“And this is a war.” Lucius wasn’t fazed in the least. “Not that it makes a difference, but what actually happened was not what I envisioned happening. It wasn’t the plan, but Arthur was breathing down my neck that day, threatening raids, and I was forced to adapt. I had to get rid of it before that happened. Your friend’s cauldron was merely convenient. I didn’t know what the diary would do, but I did know the Weasleys were close to Potter and that he would get involved, it’s what he does, which, in turn, would guarantee Dumbledore would as well. He keeps a close eye on that boy.”

Lucius leaned closer, indicating her open books. “As you should know from your reading, ordinary magic can’t destroy them. If it was a horcrux and it was going to be destroyed, it would take something immensely powerful. As the headmaster, Dumbledore has access to a number of artefacts I believed capable of doing so. Hogwarts’ magical protections are not merely meant for keeping intruders out.”

The fact that ridding himself of the diary in such a way also afforded Lucius certain protections in the event his plan did not pan out was not lost on Hermione. She just didn’t understand his callous
disregard for the consequences of his actions. As far as he was concerned, she could tell that he believed he done nothing wrong. “If you wanted his help, how do you explain your push to get Professor Dumbledore sacked?”

“An attempt to force his hand. He was talking too bloody long,” he sneered in irritation.

Lucius leaned back in his chair again, but he fixed her with a pointed stare. “If we’re going to defeat Voldemort,” he gave the name a rueful scoff as he forced himself to say it aloud, “you’re going to have to get used to a certain level of ruthlessness. You can’t afford not to.”

Hermione had to admit, much as she hated to, that he was right, in this one regard at least. She didn’t like it, but she knew who they were facing. Lucius had dealt with him far longer than she had, and if she expected to stay alive, she would have to defer to his judgment in the matter. She knew that she was already capable of crossing the line to get what she wanted, in the name of doing good. Petrifying Neville was proof of that. What she had done to Rita Skeeter, and other things, was proof of that. No, if she thought about it, Hermione did not have the moral high ground in this argument, though she held out hope that no matter what, she would never treat people so callously. “None of that explains why you even want to take him down to begin with.”

“He’s a threat to my family.”

“He was a threat twenty years ago,” she shot back.

“Twenty years ago I was still blind to what he was.”

“Then what changed?”

“I don’t know that anything actually changed. Perhaps I could merely see what he was for the first time with eyes unclouded. He considered me his right hand during the war. It wasn’t until after he was gone that I realized how much he promised and how little he delivered. I could finally see how hollow and twisted his gifts truly were.” He scowled, deep in thought.

“I never really believed in his agenda anyway, and in the years since, the Malfoy family has done quite well without him.” There was a quality to his voice that made Hermione believe that there was more to the story. Much more. She was learning quickly that her years of experience dealing with Draco gave her no advantage when it came to Lucius.

He was much more internal, cautious, and she still couldn’t get a good read on him. In her few dealings with the man over the years, she had learned that Lucius had a way with words and had long suspected he was adept at twisting lies into truth. He didn’t seem to be lying about his reasons, but he certainly wasn’t offering her the entire truth either. Hermione resigned herself to accepting his answer at face value, unless she received evidence to the contrary. “So, you don’t know how many there are, but if you’re hunting them you must have some idea.”

“I can’t be sure, of course, but I think he made six.”

Hermione nodded to herself, the wheels immediately beginning to turn in her head. It made sense, but were there other possibilities? “Because the number seven is so powerful in magic… Six horcruxes would give him a seven-part soul in a way, if you’re the sort to believe in that kind of thing.”

“From what I’ve seen, I believe he is.”

“How can you be sure though? Three is also quite powerful. Corterias theorized it was actually the most potent of magical numbers, and given the stability of triad-”
“I considered it,” he interrupted gently, halting her mid-ramble, “and I personally tend to agree with that theory. Given the container for the second, it seems unlikely to me.”

“And the second one is?” she queried with interest.

“A cup. Originally owned by Helga Hufflepuff, it was entrusted to my sister-in-law, Bellatrix Lestrange. She doesn’t know it, but it currently resides inside my vault. I didn’t think she’d miss it, considering she’s currently locked up in Azkaban.”

He watched her think through his words. Her eyes moved back and forth like they were searching for something, but her entire body was still with the kind of focus he had witnessed from the best seekers on the Quidditch pitch. It made him smile to watch. She met his eyes once more. “I take it you’d like to track down a few more on the list before we start destroying them?”

“Just in case he notices their absence. Now that he has returned, I don't know how closely he is tied to them.”

She nodded. “I agree with that course of action. And I think I agree on your assessment. A diary and a cup… a three-part soul does seem unlikely, five doesn’t seem right either, though I suppose it's possible, and I’m not sure how many more times you could split a soul before something goes catastrophically wrong. Even a wizard as powerful as Voldemort would still be working with a finite resource.” She closed her eyes to think, her brows knitting together, and she began talking to herself in a low voice. “Two, four, or six… He’s powerful and he’s too arrogant not to go all the way. It has to be six. That would leave four remaining. Do you have any leads?”

Brightest witch of her age, indeed. He pushed the thoughts beginning to stir in his head away quickly, refocusing on the task at hand before his blood could begin to stir southward. Best not to even think of it. “As you’ve read, they can be anything; however, I suppose if I were going to make one, I would want it to be meaningful in some way. It would, after all, house a piece of me.”

She couldn’t fault that argument either.

“Hogwarts has always been important to him,” he continued. “There is no way he would turn something from Hufflepuff into a horcrux while leaving Slytherin out. I think there’s one from each house.”

“Like a set. And the diary was linked to the chamber…” Hermione worried her bottom lip in thought. “That still leaves one.”

“His pet snake.” Lucius shrugged at the strange look she gave him. “He’s a parslemouth, but he doesn’t speak to it anymore, not the way he did once. That beast of his acts entirely too human sometimes that I often think they’re linked, like they can read each other's minds, or like they're one mind in two bodies. And the books don’t say anything about not using a living creature.”

“It’s possible,” Hermione conceded, “though why he would want to do such a thing is beyond me. Then again, I wouldn’t want to make a horcrux. So, if it is the snake, we just need to narrow down the ones from Slytherin, Ravenclaw, and Gryffindor.” She raked a hand through her hair, releasing a heavy sigh. “Yeah, sounds easy enough.” She could feel a headache coming on.

Lucius drained his glass and then looked at her with a guarded expression on his face. “I do hope that I have managed to impress upon you the importance of this task.”

She frowned at his tone, unnerved by the seriousness in it. “Yes, of course.”

He stood and began walking toward her as he spoke. “That this task should take precedence over
anything else? No matter how we might wish otherwise?"

A knot formed in her stomach. “Lucius, what are you talking about?”

“I need you to do something for me. Something that will insure that what we are doing remains a secret.” He pulled an envelope from his jacket pocket and held it up so that she could see her name written on it. “I intercepted this. It cannot go unanswered.” He hesitated a moment and then finally held it out to her.

She took it from him with shaking hands, noting that it had already been opened. Of course it had been. Hermione withdrew the letter and began reading with trepidation, her eyes widening and shooting to his, but she didn't say anything. She only continued to read.

“I have to go,” she stated abruptly, rising from her chair.

Lucius stood in her way, blocking her exit. “I can't allow that.”

The letter crumpled in her hand in her anger, and she lashed out at him. “My friends need me, Lucius.”

“Right now, your friends need you here. You just agreed that what we are doing now is more important. There is much still to be done, and little time in which to accomplish it. Once you return to Hogwarts, we will have limited contact. Not only do you need to get up to speed, but we still need to strategize. It won’t be all fun and games once you go back.” He waited while she thought through the situation, trying to think up an excuse to attempt to justify leaving. “My contacts at St. Mungo’s assure me that Arthur will be fine. He’s—”

“Did you have any part in this?”

His mouth twitched, and Lucius snorted inelegantly in response. “Would you even believe me if I said ‘no’?”

Hermione scrubbed her hand over her face with a groan. She didn't know if she would believe him. Everything he was saying made sense, but he was also telling her to abandon her friend's injured father.

“You know I'm right, no matter how much you may wish otherwise. Now, I need you to write a response to this letter. If you don't, this whole thing comes crashing down before we've even begun.” He placed his hand gently on her arm, waiting for her to look at him again. “I'm not going to make you write it. You know I could. But this needs to be done. Can you do this, Hermione? Will you?”

She nodded morosely, sniffling slightly. If circumstances were different, she would have gone in a heartbeat, but Lucius was right. As much as she hated it, this mission was too important for her to abandon and she would just have to accept that. She had to be as ruthless as he had warned her she would need to be, and this would be her first test in doing so.

She hated every blasted second of it, feeling like the worst kind of friend, as she set quill to parchment.

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For two days, Hermione had been holed up in Lucius’ library, which was really just fine with her. She needed to work, to keep her mind off Mr. Weasley. For the most part, she was successful. The house elves brought breakfast and lunch to her, and Lucius brought her news of Mr. Weasley’s
condition; improving rapidly, thankfully. She had only left the library for dinner, at Lucius’ insistence, and to bathe and sleep. The bedroom suite Lucius had given her had been a guest room in the family wing of the house. Most of the manor had apparently been closed off for some time, as his elven workforce was split between estates.

She had attempted at one point to engage Lucius in a conversation about the merits of liberating the poor creatures, but he had proven mulishly stubborn on the topic. He had thrown a snide parting shot over his shoulder that if his elves abandoned his home like the ones in Gryffindor tower, he would know whom to blame, and had exited the library, leaving her to her books. The remark had been puzzling to say the least. The tower elves were happy, and free, obviously working of their own will out of gratitude. He was just being mean because he couldn’t admit she was right.

Lucius himself, had been in and out of the manor several times to meet with his associates. He’d had them tracking down the whereabouts of obscure artefacts. Some were related to their mission, others were not, in an effort to conceal his true intentions. Luckily, Lucius was well known as a collector of rare magical items, so his search and his chosen method were not out of character, but she wondered if it was the collecting or the horcrux hunt that had actually come first.

Hermione had finished reading the original three books, the sections pertaining to horcruxes anyway, and had read over every word of Lucius’ own notes, written in the prettiest, flowing script she had ever seen, precise like her own, but she could only describe it as extravagant. She had also begun brushing up on her Hogwarts history, and reading through the biographies of the four founders, paying special attention to any mention of special items owned by or associated with them.

There was a light tap on her shoulder, and Hermione looked up to see a glass of firewhisky held aloft at the edge of her vision. It had been an intense experience at first, but she was really starting to develop a taste for it. “Thank you. Anything new?” she asked as she accepted the glass from him.

He appeared in front of her, near silent on the plush carpet, holding up a stunning emerald pendant necklace on a golden chain. “Just another worthless trinket.” He let it slip from his fingertips to land in the middle of her opened book. Hermione picked it up to examine it. It was covered in ancient runes, carved into every facet on both sides. Most were a mystery to her, but she could make out a couple that appeared to have something to do with fish… and the moon. Maybe. “How much did this ‘worthless trinket’ cost?”

“Mmm, only ten,” he replied, sinking gracefully into his customary leather chair across from her.

Her brow creased, “I would have it thought it worth more than ten galleons. Is the stone fake?”

“No,” he said nonchalantly, “I meant it was ten thousand.” She nearly dropped it out of shock. Instead, she held it out to him with shaking hands. He waved her off, “It’s nothing. Keep it.”

It was possibly the most expensive thing she had ever held, and he was so flippant about it. “Is that how you avoided Azkaban after the war? Money?”

Lucius favored her with a sly smile. “If you recall from your history lessons, I was under the Imperius curse during the war.”

Her eyes narrowed at him. “And how many officials did you have to bribe to pull that off?” He only shrugged noncommittally and grinned slyly again.
“It’s too much. I really can’t accept it.” But she continued to turn it over in her hands, inspecting
the inscriptions. She wanted to accept it. Badly.

He shrugged indifferently. “You could simply consider it your fee. Everyone else on this venture is
getting paid. You may as well. But if you’re far too principled to accept payment, simply consider
it a Christmas gift. Besides, you know you’re dying to know what it says.” Christmas. She had
forgotten all about it.

“And I suppose you already know what it says?” A raised eyebrow as her gaze slid from the
emerald to him, but she only received another small shrug before he changed the subject.

“I assume you are not trained in Occlumency.” It was more a statement than a question as he stood
and moved to one of the bookshelves.

“It’s not a subject that Hogwarts teaches. It’s too rare a skill for it to be offered as a class.”
Although it was certainly one that she would have been interested in learning. Hermione just
figured it was something she would have to do on her own time, one day, in the future.

Lucius plucked a book off the shelf and handed it over to her. “Both rare and difficult, but I
wouldn’t have thought such a reason could possibly stop you. This should get you started.”

“That’s not the reason,” she replied somewhat defensively. “It’s just, trying to study for O.W.L.s
and everything that’s been going on this year, every year actually... Well it doesn’t leave much
time for loads of extracurricular study.”

“Well you’re going to have to make the time,” Lucius stated simply, “As I said, the Dark Lord is
an accomplished legilimens, and I won’t work with a partner who can’t defend herself from it.
There was a time when I couldn’t defend against it myself. Nothing good came of it. The practice
will have to wait, but you can at least get acquainted with the theory.”

Hermione had, of course, heard the stories of Voldemort’s prowess with invading minds, not only
to find out secrets, but to psychologically torture his victims as well. The reports all had one detail
in common, from those who had witnessed and lived through it anyway: Voldemort enjoyed the
torture. It was perhaps, the one and only thing he really loved. There was a long silence during
which time too many thoughts swirled around in her head, and Hermione ran her fingers
absentmindedly over the book’s spine. She could feel the indentation of the lettering, smell the
heady scent of old parchment, but her mind was far away from the book in her hands.

“Do you think we actually stand a chance?”

She had thought the question before, many times over the years, may have even voiced it but she
couldn’t remember for sure. It was Lucius himself that made this time different from all the others.
He hid it well, but she could see the apprehension in his eyes whenever he spoke about the dangers
and the consequences. To see her own fears reflected in someone as capable as him... He wouldn’t
look at her for a long time. She could see the fleeting thoughts pass through his mind, but they
were gone just as quickly as they had come.

He was quiet for so long that she was afraid he wasn’t going to answer her which would have been
a telling statement on its own. His low voice finally broke the heavy silence. “I believe so.”

The statement surprised her a little. She hadn’t expected Lucius Malfoy to offer her empty words.
Thus far, he had been surprisingly truthful, albeit, a little secretive. Did he really think they could
win this? “Why?”
He finally did look at her and the gravity of his expression told her everything she needed to know. His words hadn’t been empty. In the moment before he spoke, Hermione knew what he was going to say, but her question hung in the air between them, and the answer was something they both needed to hear spoken aloud.

“There is no alternative. If I don’t believe it’s possible, I have no reason to fight. If I don’t believe we stand a chance, then we’ve already lost.” The answer solidified the path beneath her feet. It bound them together in this shared mission and she knew there was no choice for her but to see it through.
It's time for more smut lovely readers! This is my first time writing Hermione's first time and she actually wants it!

Couple of notes: There are some perspective shifts in this chapter that could throw you off if you're not prepared for them. Also, the contraceptive potion is gender neutral. It can be taken before or after by either individual. It's just easier that way and as of right now, works better that way for a later chapter.

Without further adieu, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sleep had eluded her that night. She'd tossed and turned restlessly, worn a hole in the floor with her pacing, and was still wide awake, unable to turn off her brain. Tomorrow, she would be returning to Hogwarts. Her bags were packed, including her wand which he had returned early as a small gesture of trust. She had a few new books, a new emerald enigma, and a stomach full of butterflies.

Hermione tried to recall if she had been as nervous before her first day at Hogwarts, but she didn’t think so. On her first day, she hadn’t been planning to take down the most dangerous wizard of their time with the help of another wizard she had always thought hated her. The stakes on her first day had not been life and death. Certainly, she had been in some dangerous situations before, but Harry had always assumed the brunt of both responsibility and danger. Tomorrow she would be stepping into a big role in the war against Voldemort, and though she would still have her friends there to support her, it wasn’t the same. They couldn’t know the truth. She couldn’t put them in that kind of danger. They probably wouldn’t believe her anyway. She almost didn’t believe it herself.

She continued to worry at her bottom lip, while deep in thought, as she had been doing for a while. Hermione had been rooted to the floor for what seemed like hours, staring at nothing. The fire, once blazing, had burned low in that time. Her thoughts raced as she found herself unable to focus on anything but the dread lancing through her. Finally, she shook herself from her paralysis, swallowing hard around the fear in her throat, and climbed into bed.

Darkness began rapidly overtaking her vision, and she found herself suddenly thrown onto her back with a pair of hands wrapped around her throat. She struggled, but couldn't move beneath the solid mass. Her assailant was heavy, his full weight pressing her into the mattress, trapping her intimately beneath him. Her hands reached up, pushing at his chest, pulling futilely at the vise-like grip cutting off her airway, but her strength failed as consciousness swiftly fled.

“Hermione?” His voice sounded far away, but she could still hear the sleep-addled confusion in it. Her eyelids grew heavy as her heartbeat began to slow, and she thought, belatedly, that she should have woken him first, but it wasn’t like she had any experience with crawling into a man’s bed while he slept. Lucius released her suddenly as he came to his senses enough to realize what was happening. She took the opportunity to fill her oxygen-starved lungs with huge gasps, massaging her throat as she coughed fitfully.
“What are you doing?” Lucius’ confusion was heavily laced with panic at what he had nearly done. His resolve to keep his distance had been wavering, and as the day grew closer for her to leave, his nights had grown more restless. As he had finally dropped off into an uneasy slumber, on this last night that he could have had her before sending her on her way, he had declared himself successful. Now she was in his bed, unexpectedly, and his head was spinning. He had assumed she would want to stay as far away from him as possible.

She looked at him as her vision cleared. He had pulled away from her, and was sitting back on his heels, bathed in the moonlight streaming in through the window. His chest was bare, a single pale scar twisting up and over the right side of his abdomen, skirting along his ribs to disappear around his back. The indigo sheet wound around his hips tightly, as if he had also had trouble getting to sleep, and was situated low enough that Hermione could tell there was nothing underneath. It was the most she had ever seen of him. For once, she was more clothed than he was.

“What are you doing here?” The repeated question snapped her back to reality, and she sat up slowly, resting her weight on one hand while the other reached out boldly, with only the slightest hesitation, to run lightly down his stomach.

He slapped it away almost violently, cursing under his breath. “You don’t need to do that. I told you I wouldn’t touch you.”

She'd caught him looking of course, from the corner of her eye, several times, but he had kept his hands to himself, just as he had promised.

“And you've kept your word, but now I want you to touch me.” Hermione reached out for him again, her touch just as light as before. This time he didn’t move away, but he didn't move towards her either.

“I think we have a good chance, better than most, but just in case it all goes wrong… I know you want to.” She was relieved when he didn't try to reassure her with empty promises that everything would be okay, that they would succeed. They both knew there was no guarantee of that.

Her hand slid lower, resting just above the fabric, causing him to inhale sharply, and shift his weight, looking away. He was shaking his head slowly, eyes shut tight in an effort at maintaining his self-control. Hermione felt in her gut that he would deny her.

“This is what you want?” he asked softly, finally looking at her again. The look in his eyes spoke of barely concealed need as he hovered at the edge of his restraint. He clearly wanted what she was offering. He clearly wanted her. For reasons she couldn't fathom, he wanted her, and somehow, she wanted him too.

Hermione had been standing at the foot of his bed for a long time, watching him sleep, trying to decide what she should do: turn around and leave or join him. She knew she probably could have found a fellow student, someone closer to her own age, once she returned to the school, but she also knew that Lucius could make her feel good, as the fading memory of his touch could attest. Anyone else was an unknown, and to her logical brain, that alone tipped the scale in his favor.

“This is what I want.” Her fingers dipped inside, hooking the sheet as she dragged him forward, urging him to act. “I’ve thought about it all night. What you did before was amazing. I want that again. I want more of that. I want to feel—”

Suddenly he was no longer resisting, as if her reassurance was all he had been waiting for. His mouth crashed against hers hungrily for the first time in a week. It was completely different from the other times: unrestrained, passionate, wild. Hermione was shocked to discover that one person
could kiss her in so many different ways as she kissed him back with equal fervor.

“No, wait.” His voice already sounded ragged, cutting through the foggy haze clouding her brain. This time, when he tore himself away from her, he was as out of breath with his growing arousal as she was. “Are you sure that you want this? How much have you had?”

She scoffed at him, “Just a shot… for courage. Seriously. I’m not drunk. I know what I’m asking.” After all he had done… the alcohol was too much? He drew some pretty strange and haphazard moral lines.

Lucius shook his head slightly, and nipped at her neck, just below her earlobe, his breath stirring little wisps of her hair, “You mean that legendary lion’s courage runs out at some point?”

She started to undo the buttons of her pajama top with a nervous laugh, “Yeah. Right about the time I start contemplating sleeping with a classmate’s father.”

He stilled her hands just as they freed the second button, a small, enigmatic smile touching his lips. “You really shouldn’t worry about that. You should also slow down,” his lips pressed against hers in a gentle caress. “Trust me, you don’t want to rush this.”

Lucius released her and crawled to the bedside table where he rummaged around briefly in the drawer. She was just about to ask what he was doing when he apparently found what he was looking for. Pulling out a small vial, he uncapped it and downed the contents in a single swallow. When he tossed the empty vial onto the tabletop, Hermione realized with a start what he had just taken. Madame Pomfrey offered it to the student body at school, no questions asked. There were charms he could have used of course, but they tended to be hit or miss, though no one had been able to determine why that was yet. The potion was much more stable. At least one of us is thinking straight. Hermione didn’t want to consider what might have happened if he had forgotten too.

He rejoined her on the bed, pulling her into his lap, and her worry melted away as his mouth reclaimed hers in a sensual kiss practically designed to stoke desire in her. His hands seemed to be everywhere. They tangled in her hair, holding her to him as he kissed her passionately. They skimmed down her sides, falling at her hips to grip tightly so that she ground against his growing erection through layers of cotton and silk. Eventually they found their way to the buttons of her pajama top and began to ever so slowly work them free. Her hands were more stationary, roving over the hard planes of his chest, feeling the solid muscle flex beneath his skin, and occasionally straying up and over his shoulders to play in the silky strands at the nape of his neck.

As the garment slipped from her shoulders, Hermione’s head fell back with a sigh, exposing her throat. Lucius took the opportunity it offered to suck on the bare skin of her collarbone, unobstructed, marking her, claiming her, if only briefly. It was a spot he remembered well from his school days: perfectly positioned to remain hidden if she wanted but also to peek out from the collar of her shirt if she didn’t.

Whether or not she displayed it made no difference to him. Until it faded, every time she looked in the mirror, she would be his, reminded of this night and the pleasure he had given her. He groaned against her skin at the thought as he reached into the waistband of her pants, working his finger inside her and his breath caught at the feel of the wetness he found there already.

“Oh, you have been thinking about this. Haven’t you?” She turned her face away but didn’t answer. “That’s an emphatic ‘yes’ if ever I saw one,” he chuckled, nipping at her jaw and adding another finger.

“Tell me, did you touch yourself?” he murmured. Hermione squirmed in his lap, forcing his digits
deeper. “Like I'm touching you now?” He ached at the thought, longing for her to tell him so, and
certain she wouldn't, though her reaction spoke for her clearly enough.

Her skin flushed at his words, but she was too focused on the pleasurable sensation between her
legs to answer. Groaning, she writhed against his hand, her fingernails digging into his shoulders. It
took a concentrated effort for her to pry her hands off him, half-moon indentations left behind when
she did so. Hermione’s hands skittered over his chest, searching for a place to land, a place to hold
on.

As familiar as the feeling of his fingers was, she knew this time was different, because this time
they weren’t stopping at hands and mouths. She didn’t know what to expect, had no solid footing
to stand on so to speak. His lips were on her throat, left hand cupping her breast, the nipple pinched
between thumb and forefinger, while the fingers of his right hand curled against and probed at her
inner walls.

And she wasn’t doing anything.

She had lied to him about the whiskey. It might have been a little more than just a shot, but not
enough to completely dull her senses. After all, she wanted to remember this. She had thought it
was enough at least to banish her nerves but maybe she had waited too long, standing at the foot of
his bed, staring at him. What if-

“Stop thinking so much,” he growled against her neck.

Was her nervousness really so transparent? Lucius cupped her cheek gently, encouraging her to
look in his eyes, thumb stroking soothingly. “Do you want to stop?"

She shook her head quickly. “No.”

“Then stop worrying. Tonight is about you. So, trust me. Trust me to give you what you need. You
must already on some level. Why else would you choose me?” He kissed her lips, the hollow of her
throat, the tops of her breasts, nibbling and licking tenderly before he continued. “You don’t need
to do anything tonight. Relax. Enjoy it. I certainly will.” The pad of his thumb slid across her clit.
Hermione bucked her hips into his touch and he pressed harder in response.

She fell backwards, pulling him down on top of her, pushing her fears from her mind, until all that
remained was him and the way he made her feel. Hermione liked the feeling of his weight pressing
her into the mattress, now that he wasn’t trying to choke the life out of her. The press of his body
didn't last though, his mouth replacing his roving hand as he used it to brace his weight above her.
Lucius was taking great care to make her feel at ease, his kind words doing as much to help her
relax as his gentle caresses.

As his thumb massaged her sensitive clit and his fingers slid deeper, she suddenly decided her
pajama bottoms were in the way. She needed them off. Now. She needed to feel his skin against
hers. Hermione lifted her hips, skinning the fabric down her legs as far as she could reach, kicking
them the rest of the way off as Lucius assisted in the removal. He returned to fingering her,
suckling greedily at her skin. By the time he added a third finger, her eyes had glazed over, and she
was breathing raggedly with need.

Goosebumps rose on her skin as Lucius released her nipple from his mouth, giving her one last
bruising kiss and staring into her eyes, before making his way slowly down her body. His lips
skimmed down the valley between her breasts, hovering millimeters above her flesh. As he
traveled lower, Hermione’s hands landed on the back of his head. Her fingers wove into his hair,
guiding him the final distance so that he could kiss his way down her stomach. He paused
momentarily to lick at her navel before continuing downward, latching onto her clit at last.

Lucius was as good as he had been the first time. He didn't seem to mind being held against her at all as her hips pressed up, effectively trapping him, and forcing him to continue. She thought she should have felt worse about it, but she was too close to care much.

His fingers moved faster in and out as his expert tongue devoured her, and she could feel herself hovering on the edge, but she wasn’t quite there yet, and it wasn’t like he was intentionally drawing it out like before, either. Her head whipped to the side in frustration and Hermione had the sudden, inexplicable vision of herself continuing the movement, of rolling over onto her stomach, of feeling him pressed against her back, his lips moving across her shoulder, hearing his silky voice in her ear as he held her down, and seconds later, the orgasm ripping through her at the fantasy caused her hips to buck against him. His fingers slipped in deep before her muscles clamped down tightly, locking him in, and Hermione convulsed rhythmically around him as she rode out her climax.

It took several long moments for the death-grip on his fingers to subside so that he could remove them. He was more reluctant to lose the taste of the nectar filling his mouth and kept on licking her hungrily. Lucius had found himself addicted to the taste since first introduced to the unique flavor. He had no idea why so many men were, not only hesitant, but flat out opposed to the act.

There was nothing quite like it in his opinion, and if it were possible, he would feast on her all day long. As such, he was determined that she would come on his tongue one more time before he finally gave her what she wanted: a night of unbridled passion on the eve of battle. While it wasn’t technically accurate, the analogy held well enough.

His cock throbbed insistently, trapped beneath the bed sheet winding serpent-like about him. It reawakened, responding to her harsh pants, her desperate gasps, and her alluring little whimpers. He kicked frantically at the sheet twisted about his leg, trying to free himself, and groaned in relief when the constricting fabric finally released him.

Moments later, her entire body unexpectedly surged upward, all at once, and Lucius barely avoided a broken nose as he pushed her back down. He marveled at the fact that she had come to him, not some fumbling classmate, because she realized that he knew her body well enough now to make it good for her. As he blinked away the stars dancing before his eyes, he swore that she would be pleased with her choice, and would look back on her first time with nothing but fondness.

She felt him moving between her legs as the last vestiges of her pleasure subsided. Her eyes fluttered open, blinking languidly as she watched him. Lucius had untangled the bed sheet from his waist, and was positioning himself between her thighs, fisting his hard cock, his eyes burning with desire. He grasped the back of one knee, lifted her leg, and draped it over his hip, moving closer to her. She whimpered slightly, sensitive from her recent climax as he rocked his hips, sliding his shaft against her labia, and slicking himself against her.

As he teased her, she ran her hand lightly up his arm where it rested beside her, supporting his weight. Her voice was rougher than she expected, pitched low with arousal. “I’m not changing my mind.” A slight nod, and he pulled back far enough for the head of his cock to catch on her entrance.

Lucius pressed forward, slowly and steadily, biting his lower lip as his breathing quickened pace, and he struggled to slow it. His arm trembled beneath her hand from the effort of controlling himself or perhaps it was just from the effort of holding himself still above her. Her other hand gripped the silk beneath her tightly, and she concentrated on the feeling of him entering her inch by agonizingly slow inch.
When he finally hilted inside her, he released a strangled moan that he had been holding in, and stopped moving, allowing her time to adjust to the stretch. He shut his eyes tightly as a pained expression settled on his face. When he opened them again, the intensity of his gaze practically scorched her. Watching him struggle for control thrilled her. Lucius was one of the most controlled people she had ever met and she loved watching that control get stripped away until all that remained was passion.

“Fuck… You feel incredible,” he sighed, caressing his free hand up over her stomach, and through the valley between her breasts.

It seemed like forever to Hermione before he moved. When he did, it was shallow, experimental, testing to see if she was ready. Hermione wrapped her other leg around him to let him know that she was. He withdrew almost completely and thrust back in fully.

Her back arched.

Her nails dug into his arm.

She inhaled sharply and cried out shakily.

Lucius maintained his languid pace, fucking her slowly and deeply. The uncomfortable feeling subsided to be replaced by a feeling of fullness, as wonderful as it was strange. Lucius never took his eyes off her. He studied her, noted her reactions, and repeated what she liked. Her respiration rate increased as her body responded to him, and every time he hilted inside her, he ground his pelvis against hers until her hips rose to meet his every thrust.

“Please,” Hermione moaned.

“Faster,” she demanded.

Only then did he pick up the pace. He didn’t withdraw quite so far before slamming back into her. Beneath the sound of their combined panting and moans, Hermione could hear the obscene sounds of her pussy clutching at him, and his flesh slapping against hers with every thrust.

Lucius didn’t know how much longer he was going to last. She was wet, slick, and so tight, her muscles clenching him like a vise. He loved how she responded, with such enthusiasm he no longer needed to watch for her reactions. She was rather vocal in her pleasure when she wasn't actively trying to stifle it.

His eyes were closed, head thrown back, jaw slack as he concentrated on holding on just a little longer. With his eyes closed, her unexpected touch nearly distracted him enough to send him over the edge. Her hand roved over his chest, and he lowered his body enough for it to travel farther up, grasp him by the neck, and drag his mouth to hers.

His skin was slick, flush with exertion. Hermione realized hers was too. She opened her mouth under his, and a split-second later, Lucius changed the angle of his hips. He swallowed her scream as he hit the same spot he so expertly manipulated with his fingers whenever he used his mouth on her. Hermione’s vision whited-out for a second, the intensity sudden and unexpected. Then he did it again. He brought her closer to orgasm with each thrust, swallowing her moans the same way he had swallowed her screams.

When he reached between them to massage her clit between his fingers, Hermione clutched at his shoulders, digging her heels into his arse, her back arching off the bed. Her mouth tore away from his with a whimper and she urged desperately, “Oh, Lucius... I'm so close. Please…” He pinched
the bundle of nerves he was toying with and her muscles began clamping down on him harder as she bucked uncontrollably against him, and came with a keen and a deep groan of satisfaction. She collapsed boneless with a shudder, the aftershocks of her third orgasm spasming through her body.

Lucius’ hips were still pistoning into her when she came back to her senses moments later, his movements jerky and erratic. He was growling obscenities in her ear, face buried in her neck. Hermione let her eyelids flutter closed, drinking in the sounds of his impending release. With a few final thrusts, he grunted, so deeply it sounded more like a roar, his breath hot on her skin, his hips gradually slowing as he finished. Lucius slumped on top of her, chest heaving, and they lay together, breath slowly returning to normal. Her fingers wandered across the broad expanse of his back, and she whispered dreamily, “It’s possible you’re not quite the utter bastard I thought you were.”

He laughed softly, his breath warm against her neck, lips light on her skin. “I don’t believe I’ve heard that particular post-coital compliment before.”

Hermione pushed gently at his shoulder, prodding him to move as his weight grew uncomfortable. With a deep sigh, Lucius slipped free of her, rolled the both of them over, and dragged the rumpled bed sheet across them tiredly. Hermione lay her head down on his shoulder as she began to drift off, a small half-smile playing on her lips. As his seed pooled between them, to run down her thigh, she wondered if she should clean it up but was too exhausted to care as sleep finally claimed her.

Chapter End Notes

See, Lucius has some will power after all. Hope you liked this one.
Hermione blinked her eyes open owlishly to stare at Lucius’ shoulder only inches from her face. They’d separated sometime during the night, though Lucius’ fingers still lay curled casually over her waist. Carefully, so that she didn’t disturb him, Hermione extricated herself from his bed, and his grasping hand. She looked around briefly for her clothes, but gave it up as a hopeless cause as her bladder insisted that she empty it. A bit sore from the previous night’s activities, but pleasantly so, she made her way to the loo.

It wasn’t until she caught sight of herself in the bathroom mirror that she actually felt like she’d been mauled by an animal. Her hair was even more unruly than usual, resisting her efforts to tame it back in some kind of order. There was nothing to be done about the deep purple blotches on her chest, the darkest of which lay over her collarbone, and… Hermione leaned closer to peer into the mirror. Bite marks? Sure enough, a ring of teeth marks marred the swell of one breast. He had bitten her, not hard enough to draw blood, but there would be a faint mark for a day or so. Hermione couldn’t remember him doing that for some reason.

Lucius was still asleep when she returned to the bedroom, which surprised her. The last time they had shared a bed, he had been up before her. She had been expecting the same. He had changed positions since she’d left, rolling onto his back, an arm flung out at his side. Crawling back into bed carefully, she pulled the edge of the sheet up to wrap loosely about herself. His even breathing didn’t change.

The moonlight and dying fire had given him the appearance of some beautiful marble sculpture, but hadn’t offered enough light for a detailed inspection. The early morning sunlight filtering in through the giant floor to ceiling windows was a different story, so she sat cross-legged and just watched him sleep. From what she could see of his face, he looked relaxed, lips slightly parted, white-gold silk cascading over his face and across the pillow. His broad chest rose and fell softly in sleep.

That same broad chest was a mess of red welts and crescent shaped marks. She had apparently done a little mauling of her own. Beneath the damage she had done, at least three separate sets of scratches, though from what she could remember, she was sure his back looked much the same, his shoulders, arms, and pectorals were solid. Hermione admired her unintentional handiwork, liking the way her marks stood out, a vibrant red against the paleness of his skin. The ones on his arm, gifted with his first real thrust, were a little bloody. Her gaze drifted back to his chest and moved downward. The smattering of chest hair, and the trail disappearing beneath the bed sheet were so much darker. If those gorgeous locks of his were white-gold, then the hair on his chest and lower was honey, giving him a warmth that he had always lacked whenever she had seen him in the past, all buttoned up. His disheveled appearance didn't hurt either.

Her eyes fell to his stomach where the sheet pooled low at his waist, the silk leaving little to the imagination as to what lay beneath. His stomach wasn’t solid muscle like the upper half of his
torso, though it wasn’t exactly soft either. He looked like he had been well-defined once, and he
obviously took care of himself, but it hadn’t escaped her notice that he also liked his alcohol. He
often had a glass of something: in the library, in his study, at dinner.

What truly interested her about his abdomen, was the twisted scar she had noticed before, the
damage extensive enough to stand out in stark relief on a moonlight night. In the light of day, it
didn’t look as clean as she had first thought. It was jagged. Something had torn him up badly. The
scar had, quite frankly, surprised her when she had seen it. Considering the vast litany of healing
spells and potions available, it shouldn’t have even existed. At the very least, it shouldn’t look the
way it did. It was a pale pink, though some sections of it were a sickly white, so it must have been
a truly traumatic injury. Hermione touched it lightly, wondering how it had been acquired. It
looked old.

“Quidditch. Fifth year. Slytherin versus Gryffindor.”

Her eyes flicked up to his. He was watching her, a sleepy look in his eyes as his fingertips brushed
against her thigh. She pulled the sheet a little higher, blushing slightly, at having been caught
staring, not at the fact that they were both essentially naked. Hermione was stunned to realize it
didn’t really bother her. After their night together, it almost didn’t even seem odd. “How long have
you been awake?”

He smiled as he turned toward her, propping himself up on an elbow, and touched one of the marks
on his shoulder. “For a while. Having a good, long look, were you? I’m practically shredded.”

Of course, he had been watching through the curtain of hair half obscuring his face. She should
have suspected as much. “Mine were unintentional,” she replied, stroking her fingertips over the
bruise he had left on her collarbone, as though daring him to deny the implied accusation.

“Oh so, you only mauled me accidentally? Then I shudder to think what you could do if you were
really trying.” He reached out to gently trace the ring of tiny bruises left by his teeth, a smile
tugging at the corner of his mouth. “But I may have gotten a little carried away.” Rather than
continue his gentle caresses, or attempt to deepen them, Lucius let his hand fall and rolled onto his
back again, closing his eyes and stretching languidly with a contented sigh.

Hermione dropped her hand back to his scar, tracing it, the muscles beneath jumping slightly at the
contact. “Plenty of witches and wizards have scars, you know,” he murmured.

“They aren’t Lucius-bloody-Malfoy.” She continued to run her finger tips over it. He had been her
age when it happened. “It’s strange you would even have this, considering Hogwarts has always
employed the best healers.”

“Not really so strange,” he replied quietly.

She waited for him to elaborate but he didn’t seem inclined to do so. Hermione was sure Madam
Pomfrey had been at Hogwarts at that time. How could she, or Professor Dumbledore for that
matter, have left such an injury untreated? Hogwarts couldn’t have been so different in his day.
“Surely the headmaster knew? And Madam Pomfrey?”

Lucius snorted inelegantly at that. “It halted the match. Of course they knew. Everyone did. It
wasn't as if they could do anything.”

“I don’t understand why they wouldn’t-”

He cut off her question, glaring at her in warning, and sitting up abruptly. The sudden move
startled her. “It’s not your concern. It’s healed. What does it matter? Do you think you can do something about it? Dumbledore saw it happen and couldn’t do anything about it.” He moved away from her, leaning back against the headboard, arms crossed over his chest defensively, scowling, and looking anywhere but at her.

It was effectively a dismissal, in action if not word. Stubborn as she was, she refused to let that stop her.

He was obviously trying to distance himself, using his body language to shut down the conversation. Hermione inwardly cursed her tactlessness. Working out problems out loud was something she clearly needed to get under control. She suspected the story behind his scar was not a pleasant one, and it was one he was clearly reluctant to tell.

And yet…

He had put distance between them, yes, but Lucius hadn’t simply left the room. He could have. Or he could have kicked her out. It was his bedroom. Was it merely a defense mechanism then? Did some part of him want to tell her the story? It was possible. He had told her things already that no one else knew.

She started cautiously. “Look, you said we were partners, and you know a lot more about me than I know about you. I’m just curious because it doesn’t make sense. It doesn’t fit with what I’ve seen before from the people involved.” He still wasn’t looking at her, but he seemed to be listening. Sort of.

“I just want to understand it. That’s all.”

“You can’t.” He scrubbed a hand over his face, and from behind that hand, she heard him mutter softly, “You’re a fucking muggleborn.” The words were like a punch to the gut, and Hermione flinched at the unexpected pain they caused. He realised what he had said immediately, his head snapping up, and cursed himself at the hurt look on her face. “That’s not what I- It’s just, how could you understand?”

“Because I’m muggleborn?” She tried to keep her voice steady as she replied. At least he hadn't said the other word.

“Yes, but I don't mean that the way you think. It’s different being a pure-blood. There are expectations...” His head made a dull thud, connecting with the headboard behind him as he leaned back, gazing in the direction of the window. “I suppose you can’t hope to understand what you don’t know…”

The last bit was not directed at her. He was talking to himself aloud as he thought about what she had said. Lucius drew in a deep breath. When she saw the shadow that crossed his face before he turned his head away, running a hand through his hair, in what was probably an anxious gesture, for him anyway, she realized whatever came out of his mouth would be horrendous. Lucius released that breath as he began to speak.

“There was a bludger,” he started slowly, those first few words pried from him with great reluctance. “Two of them actually.” His mouth twitched with the barest hint of a sardonic, hesitant grimace, his gaze flicking back to hers briefly before he looked away again, his eyes taking on a faraway look, as if seeing the memory play out before him as he spoke. “I started as a chaser, but I was so good at reading people that I was moved to keeper my fourth year. It gave us the option to use me as an extra chaser if needed.”
Her eyes nearly glazed over from the Quidditch talk, as he worked himself up towards the heart of his story, but after her years of practice listening to Harry and Ron, she managed to catch herself quickly. She had asked for it after all, and given his defensive nature, she shouldn't have been at all surprised that he wouldn't dive straight into it.

“Anyway, “he continued, “fifth year, a few hours into the match, Gryffindor was down, desperate for points. We had the better seeker, so they knew they would have to outscore us by quite a lot. They sent both bludgers and the quaffle directly at me, all at once. They probably thought they could score on the rebound if I were suitably distracted.” He made a face as if the idea were simply ludicrous. “So, I dodged the first bludger, tended the quaffle, and the second bludger sent me spiraling off into the base of the stands. No one could get a lock on me to stop me from falling, not even Dumbledore. I lost my broom at some point, hit a few of the support beams on the way down, and ended up underneath the stands. If I had lost my broom sooner, it, or rather pieces of it, might not have ended up under me when I did.”

She looked at his scar again with renewed interest and alarm at the revelation. “You didn’t get impaled on your broom, did you?” Hermione’s stomach churned at the thought. As she looked at it, she could now see how it might have torn him open, ripping through his abdomen and leaving bloody ruin in its wake.

“Nearly.” His fingers traced absently over the most grievous section of it as he spoke. “The piece of it that I landed on was at just the right angle, that it wasn’t technically an impalement. At least, that’s what I was told. I don’t remember hitting the ground. I was out cold by then.”

“But, why didn’t they fix you?” Hermione asked, horrified. “Use a healing spell? A potion? I mean it’s Hogwarts.” It really didn’t make sense to her. How could the headmaster have allowed such a thing?

Lucius’ eyes were wary when he focused on her again. He didn't speak, studying her intently and Hermione held her breath, understanding that the part he really hadn’t wanted to tell her was still coming. As bad as his revelation was, it meant nothing to him compared with what came next. “They couldn’t. It was my father’s idea of punishment, of teaching me a lesson.”

It was not what she had been expecting to hear.

“What kind of lesson could you possibly learn from that?”

“A simple one: obey or face the consequences. He didn’t approve of me playing Quidditch. He always said it was a sport for lesser men, something to amuse the masses. Not for a Malfoy. I disagreed, and it was one of the few things I held firm on. Learning which battles to pick is a skill pure-bloods pick up early. He couldn’t stop me from playing, but he rescinded permission for magical healing beyond what was necessary to save my life, if it ever came to that. And it did.”

“But if you had died? What would he have done, your father?”

“I was his only son. That wouldn't have happened,” Lucius confidently stated.

“Humor me,” and Hermione did her best to keep the quaver out of her voice. “You knew him. What would he have done?”

“Well,” he began, frowning in thought, “he would have mourned me in the papers. That’s a given. He might or might not have mourned in private. I mean, he tended to be rather distant, but he had still invested sixteen years into my education as the next in line. So, maybe.” Lucius gave a small shrug. “Probably not. We didn’t exactly get along. Then he would have taken another pure-blood
wife, young enough to bear children of course, and he would have started over.”

Hermione kept her features schooled in a blank mask even though his words made her sick to her stomach. He was so matter-of-fact, like there was absolutely nothing wrong with what he was saying, and she suddenly knew where his callous disregard for human suffering had come from. He saw himself as easily replaceable, a tool to be used for a specific purpose. How could he see other people as anything more than that?

She could feel the bile rising in her throat, but swallowed it down because he had turned back to her. She knew he was staring at her, waiting for her response. But what could she say? Something innocuous? Something that wouldn't reveal how disturbing she found the conversation? It certainly couldn't be anything about his father. That was the one thing she did know. “So was that was your only injury? Cause I've seen Harry get hurt loads of times. That's part of the reason I've never really been a fan of the sport.”

He seemed satisfied with the change to a slightly safer topic, and leaned his head back with what she thought was a small sigh of relief. “No, not the only one, just the most gruesome. The bruises and broken bones healed well enough, but this,” he said gesturing to his side, “took a little longer. Every breath was agony until it finally healed. It made me appreciate magic, though. I never really had before that.”

“So, what happened after that? When you healed up.”

He lifted an eyebrow, giving a slight roll of his eyes. “I acquired a new broom, and we beat Hufflepuff by a hundred points, but that's not really a difficult feat.”

Hermione shook her head slightly, digesting what he had told her, completely floored by his tale. His experience was completely opposite hers, and she would never be able to fathom such cruelty from a parent. It was little wonder that he had trust issues. “I'm not going to pretend to understand that, any of it. We both know I'd be lying, but now I understand what you meant, even if you didn’t phrase it as elegantly as you normally do.”

“So, tell me then, have I earned your pity? It’s what you bleeding heart Gryffindors tend be good at.” He asked, darkly, with more emotion than he had shown while describing his father's reaction to his hypothetical death.

Her brow furrowed and her eyes snapped to his. That was what he had feared more than anything else? “No, Lucius, not pity. Do you even realize what you just told me? You just told me that you're stubborn and that you’re defiant and that if you truly want something you'll fight for it. Considering what we're up against, those are exactly the qualities I would want from my partner. And honestly? After all that, I feel a lot better about our chances. I think we have more than just a shot.”

He looked away from her, breathing deeply through his nose, and didn’t speak for several minutes. She watched the tendons in his neck work as he fought to keep his emotions in check. “Then perhaps it’s a good thing I didn’t tell you that story before last night,” he murmured, clearing his throat. “You might never have shagged me out of desperation if I had.”

Lucius placed a hand on her thigh, high enough that she could tell what was on his mind. It was more than clear to her that he didn’t like revisiting the past, and that he was looking to change the subject, in perhaps the most obvious way he could imagine. She wasn’t exactly opposed to the idea, especially with the way his fingers were inching higher, so she decided not to fight him on it this time. He had told her more than she had expected him to anyway, and that kind of conditioning would not be undone with a single conversation, if it were even possible at all.
“I didn’t say I felt that good about our chances,” she replied teasingly, grasping the sheet and pulling on it slowly to uncover him to her view. At the same time, his fingers tightened on her thigh, grasping the fabric and tugging, gently yet insistently. With a deep breath, she allowed it to fall away, revealing herself to his hungry gaze, and watched his eyes darken as they roamed over her.

Hermione closed the distance between them before she had enough time to change her mind, straddled his thighs, sinking down onto his lap, and ran her hands over his chest, feeling his muscles jump beneath the skin. She leaned forward, brushing her lips against his in the barest of tender kisses. “In fact,” she murmured with a timid smile, “I’m suddenly, incredibly worried.”

Lucius licked his lips as if he were tasting her on them, ghosting his palms up and down her sides. His gaze never left hers, and she found herself appreciating how attentive he was. She thought it probably had a lot to do with the reason her first time had been so enjoyable. He rolled his hips against hers, pulling her flush against him so that she could feel his erection, and whispered huskily, “Then perhaps I should give you something to calm your nerves.”

Hermione dipped her head to lick one of his flat nipples, relishing his audible groan. She wasn’t sure where this bold version of herself had come from, but decided not to question it. Not now. Not for the next hour at least. “Perhaps you should.”

Chapter End Notes

Let me know if you don't hate Abraxas yet, and I'll see what I can do in a future chapter! Like I said before, he's not a nice character.
Return

Chapter Notes

I'm sad that the smut is over for a while lovely readers. It will return. Hopefully before you know it. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hermione bounced her leg impatiently as she eagerly awaited the snacks cart. She had declined Lucius’ offer of breakfast when she had found out that getting her back to Hogwarts would involve a side-along apparition. It had been the right call. Her first trip had been just as stomach churning as she had anticipated. She had gone weak-kneed for a second after they had landed, clutching onto the front of Lucius’ robes before she calmed her roiling stomach enough to take several deep breaths and stand up straight. Lucius had been looking at her quizzically, concern evident on his face.

“I’m fine,” she had assured him. “Ugh, when they say it’s rough the first time, they aren’t kidding.”

“I’m actually impressed. You haven’t vomited yet.” The amusement in his voice was obvious.

“I still might,” she replied, gagging slightly.

When she had regained her composure, he had indicated with a gesture that she should proceed toward the exit of the little out-of-the-way alcove they had appeared in. As she had walked forward, the whistle of the trains had grown louder but hadn’t drowned out the pop behind her as Lucius had disapparated. So, it begins, Hermione had thought as she had steeled the butterflies in her stomach not caused by the apparition, and stepped out into the sunlight on the train platform.

Having arrived first, she had found an empty train car to wait for her friends to arrive, and to await the food cart. She drummed her fingers on the windowsill in irritation. It was certainly taking its bloody time. Hermione was glad that she had skipped her morning meal, though. If she hadn’t, she was sure that she would have thrown up all over Lucius’ expensive shoes, but now she was ravenous and it was actually putting her a little on edge.

Hermione smiled wistfully as she looked out the window at the people scurrying by, recalling the morning's activities, a little of her ire melting away at the memory. When she closed her eyes, she could still feel his touch, his fingertips tracing delicate, almost reverent patterns over her skin, his lips that seared her flesh, following close behind. When she brought her fingers to her lips, she could feel the ghosts of his kisses as though he had imprinted them on her. She had hoped sex could be like that, but a part of her had still feared the unknown, hence the firewhiskey. Her memories of that morning and the previous night were ones she would treasure.

Lucius had proven to be no less passionate by daylight, and she had found that she rather liked the change in position, liked the little thrill of excitement that beat its way through her chest with her tentative explorations, liked the flutter in her stomach when he made his enjoyment known with a whimper or a moan. She had steadfastly avoided his scar following their conversation, and he had seemed to appreciate the consideration. All Hermione had wanted to do was to hug him tight, to let him know that he wasn't disposable, that he was more than he thought he was, and she knew that
would not have been appreciated. Lucius was clearly far too proud to stomach that response. Watching him come apart beneath her as he gripped the headboard behind his head with one hand, and her hip with the other, driving up into her as he lost control, had then become a close second.

He was so affectionate, playful, during their intimate moments, and so distant otherwise, and she could well imagine that dual nature was due to his environment and upbringing. She had never thought that growing up in a family like his would be so incredibly different from her own, that so much of who Lucius was had been determined generations before he had ever been born. That knowledge painted Draco in a new light, but even then there were differences between father and son. Lucius spoke and acted as though he were nothing more than a cog in the machine that was the Malfoy legacy. Draco knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that machine was built for him.

Hermione thought back to second year, to how Lucius had bought Draco’s way onto the Slytherin quidditch team. She thought about the way Lucius had leapt to his defense when he had been injured by Buckbeak. Draco’s behavior suddenly made a lot more sense. He was an entitled, spoiled brat because Lucius treated him as something precious, exactly the opposite of how his own father had treated him. Hermione had no idea how she was going to interact with the little sod when they got back.

As another, particularly sharp, pang of hunger stabbed at her insides, Hermione decided she would just go track the cart down herself. The door opened just as her hand touched it, Harry and Ron framed in the entryway. “Oh good, you’re here already,” Harry said, his greeting implied in the familiarity of their friendship. Ron nodded his own greeting behind Harry’s shoulder. “I needed your input on something. How are your parents?” Hermione stepped back and sat down allowing the two boys in. It looked like she would just have to wait on the cart to stop by after all.

“They’re fine. Missed me you know,” she stated, deciding the vaguer her answer, the less likely they were to ask too many questions. “How’s your dad, Ron?”

“Oh, good. Yeah.” He grinned lopsidedly at her, “He wanted to go back to work right after it happened, but mum put her foot down.”

She grinned back, “That’s great news. I’m sorry I didn’t visit.”

Ron waved his hand, “No, it’s okay. If it were your dad, or Sirius, I’d want to spend time with my family too. I get it.”

Ron’s sweet words made Hermione feel like a heel, and her heart twisted as she realized that lying to her friends was going to be even harder than she had thought. She quickly changed the subject before she was tempted to tell them both what was really going on. “You said you needed something, Harry?”

Just then, the cart finally showed up. Harry and Ron bought their customary candies, but were slack-jawed at the amount of food she purchased. “Overslept,” she looked at them sheepishly, hoping she was convincing enough. “Anyway, you were saying.” She tore into the first package quickly, biting down, amazed that packaged food could taste so good.

“Yeah, I was thinking of stepping up D.A. classes. Ron’s already agreed to help out. What do you think?” Shit! Hermione thought. That’s just exactly what I don’t need. She already had enough to deal with considering her newfound extracurricular activities. She stuffed more of the sandwich she had purchased into her mouth and chewed thoughtfully to buy herself some time to think. “I’m sorry, Harry,” she started, racking her brain quickly for a believable excuse, “but I think we’re pushing it now as is. We have to avoid Umbridge who’s actively trying to catch us at anything. And Draco’s goon squad always seems to be around. It’s already hard enough without trying to
take on more.”

“Oh, we don’t have to worry about Malfoy anymore! Didn’t you hear?” Ron finally chimed in excitedly. “Yeah, his dad packed him off to Beauxbatons. Now we just have to deal with his idiot flunkies. Shouldn’t be too hard.”

Hermione was momentarily speechless. Lucius hadn’t mentioned anything about sending Draco away.

*Right about the time I start contemplating sleeping with a classmate’s father.*

*You really shouldn’t worry about that.*

That smile of his hadn’t meant what she had thought. She realized in that enigmatic way of his, that he had technically mentioned it. “Did they happen to say why?”

He just shrugged at her, clearly unconcerned, “You know how rumours are. One’s just as likely as the next.”

“Still,” she said, recovering quickly from her shock, “I don’t think it’s a good idea. I know it’s important, but we also have other classes that can’t be ignored. Not to mention O.W.L.s at the end of term.”

Ron laughed good-naturedly, “That’s what this is all about, isn’t? Afraid you’ll get an ‘exceeds expectations’? We can’t have that now, can we?”

“Oh, don’t be an arse, Ron,” she responded instinctively.

“No,” Harry piped in, “no Hermione’s right. Once it’s all over, we’ll all have lives to live, and for most, that won’t involve defense against the dark arts.” He turned to her, “If you could help lead the classes though, I’d really appreciate it.”

She nodded at him. “Yeah, I could do that.”

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The mood and atmosphere at Hogwarts was just as somber and cloying as it had been before holiday break. There now, however, seemed to be an air of extreme danger surrounding the place. Hermione wondered if the feeling was due to her fear and uncertainty surrounding her secret mission, until she noticed similar looks of trepidation on the faces of her fellow classmates. Even though the food at dinner was just as excellent as it always was, it had seemed oddly unsatisfying. Hermione found that she had enjoyed her cold sandwich on the train so much more. At least on the train, Umbridge wasn’t watching them all with her rictus grin plastered on her face.

Professor Dumbledore seemed oblivious to her. Professor Flitwick was clearly doing his best to be nice, but that was just his nature. Professors Snape and Mcgonagall were well and truly done with her, and they weren’t doing the best job of hiding that. Umbridge, for her part, seemed to revel in the various reactions she garnered. She would have to tread carefully. In her own way, Umbridge was just as dangerous as Voldemort.

She filed into the Gryffindor common room with the rest of her housemates in hushed silence. It was as if they had all made some type of agreement to not speak until they were cloistered in the safety of the familiar tower rooms. Once the door closed behind them, conversation picked up slowly, hushed at first until it eventually grew into normal conversation.
There would be no D.A. meeting tonight, not on their first night back, and most likely not during the first week. Not only did the students need time to get settled in, they would most assuredly be watched closely at first. This was just fine with Hermione. She could get started immediately on her secret mission.

Well, almost immediately. Even though she was eager to get started, she found herself at a bit of a standstill. The library was still closed for the evening which limited her severely. She needed to find a way to gain access to the Headmaster’s office, which Fawkes was always guarding. Polyjuice probably wouldn’t fool the phoenix. She could borrow Harry’s cloak, but the cloak didn’t muffle sound, and the issue of alerting Fawkes still persisted. A silencing charm would take of that, but the cloak was also somewhat awkward for what she needed to accomplish. And then she was certain Dumbledore’s office would be warded against intrusion. A Disillusionment charm seemed like her best bet, but she didn’t think she could cast one strong enough yet. If, however, she could combine it with something else, but even that was nuanced and layered spellwork. Hermione feared that kind of magic still lay outside her capabilities, which brought her back to the library, specifically the restricted section.

Any book that would have the kind of information she was looking for, would probably be found there. One road led to another, and both currently seemed to be blocked. The night wasn’t a complete loss, though. She did have Lucius’ book on Occlumency that she could start reading through. Hermione fingered the gold chain at her throat. She was curious to translate it, but it too would have to wait until the library opened.

Hermione bid her friends in the common room good night, climbing the steps to the girls’ dormitory. She would unpack first, she had to find the book hidden deep within her luggage after all, and then she would take a nice, hot, relaxing bath. Her body ached all over, mostly in a good way, but the long train ride had been less than pleasant near the end.

Thirty minutes later, with everything put away back in place, she found herself alone in the girl’s bathroom. Hermione chose one of the private baths in the farthest corner of the room and set the tub to fill while she stripped off her clothing. She loosened her tie, jerking it free from the collar of her shirt. Catching her reflection in the mirror, she noticed what appeared to be a dark shadow hidden underneath her collar. Stepping closer to the mirror, she inspected it, only to realize that it was Lucius’ mark peeking out from beneath her shirt where her collar had fallen open. Hermione undid the top button, watching as the material fell to the side a little more. His mark was a visible beacon, one that she would wear for a solid week, perhaps longer, and if anyone saw it, there would be no denying what it was.

She toyed with the idea of wearing it in the open, but quickly dismissed the thought. There would be too many questions from her classmates, and it would draw too much attention, making her even more a target for Umbridge’s scrutiny. It too, would remain her little secret. She sighed, unfastening the rest of the shirt’s buttons and slowly opened it, letting it fall from her shoulders before she draped it over the back of a chair. Her bra and skirt soon followed, and Hermione gazed at her reflection, clad only in her cotton knickers and the emerald necklace dangling between her breasts.

With her clothes on, she looked like the model student she always had been. With them off, her flesh told a completely different tale. The tender bruise on her shoulder, the bite mark on her breast, the numerous small dots where fingertips had gripped her a little too tightly didn’t speak their tale to the world. They spoke it to her alone. They told her that she was fully capable of carrying out her secret agenda right under everyone’s noses and they wouldn’t suspect a thing.

After her time with Lucius, Hermione was beginning to suspect that she was rougher around the
edges than she had originally thought. She had known for a while that she liked breaking the rules, doing things she wasn’t supposed to, and getting away with it. Starting the D.A. under Umbridge’s nose, and sneaking around Hogwarts for as long as she could remember were merely manifestations of that. Shagging a Death Eater and enjoying it was so much farther than she had ever gone before. She had sought him out, knowing what he was, and she hadn’t cared because of what he could give her.

They would both end up in serious trouble if anyone found out what had already transpired between them. Lucius stood to lose more than her. She may have been of age, but he was a pure-blood and a Death Eater, a married man with a son her age, and she was the Gryffindor golden girl. He was also a governor on the school board and she was a student. There was no doubt in her mind what the headlines would look like. The court of public opinion would not be forgiving, and it would certainly be a miracle if he managed to avoid prison. None of that even took into account what would happen to him if Voldemort or one of the other Death Eaters found out that he had switched sides.

On her end, age and status weren’t the issue, betrayal was, or the perception of it anyway. He was the enemy and she would undoubtedly lose the respect of some of her closest friends. Still, given the choice, she would have made the same one all over again.

With a satisfied nod to her reflection, she stripped off her knickers, turned off the water, and sank into the tub with a contented sigh.

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At nearly that same moment, Lucius was feeling far from content. It was difficult to express such a feeling, he mused, when his survival was dependent on the mercurial moods of a madman. Times were certainly strange. In order to rid himself of said madman, he was now relying on… a slight frown creased his brow. Was she sixteen? Seventeen? He seriously doubted that she knew herself. Time-turners tended to make a blasted mess of things. In addition to her youth, she was a Gryffindor to boot. He might have laughed out loud at his current predicament, if he hadn’t been surrounded, and in the viper’s pit.

Lucius reached for his wine glass, and had to suppress a twinge of pain as one of the scratches on his back threatened to split open. He had used a healing salve on his arm, but the rest he had left to heal on their own, a twisted memento. He hadn’t thought any of the others had been so deep. With great care, Lucius eased back into his chair, his mind wandering to the young woman who had given him his wounds.

It relieved him immensely, that he had managed to give her the kind of experience she had needed for her first time, without rousing the darkness within himself. He had been worried at first, of course, but perhaps he needn’t have been. None of the cues had been present that would have made it sit up and take notice. In fact, it had only grown more dormant in response to her dwindling fear, and growing familiarity with him. The Dark Lord had trained him well all those years ago, but once again, mercifully, he no longer felt out of control. He felt much as he had before it had so unexpectedly clawed its way to the surface. The distance could only help him to regain his sense of equilibrium, and he quite firmly, deliberately, pushed all thoughts of her from his mind. He couldn’t afford to let memory distract him now.

Around the table, many of his fellow Death Eaters were shooting each other furtive glances. He did his best to ignore them, to act like he wasn’t bothered, that he had nothing out of the ordinary to hide. Lucius pushed thoughts of Hermione aside, and concentrated instead on clouding his mind, cloaking his thoughts in lies, before the Dark Lord arrived. He had found that it was always best to
have that mask of occlumency in place before the other wizard ever drew near.

The silence in the room turned funereal once the Dark Lord finally entered. Lucius’ skin crawled as he felt the giant snake slither past his leg, but he gave no outward sign of revulsion because he could feel a pair of serpentine eyes on him that didn’t belong to the snake. The Dark Lord took the place of honor at the head of the table, his gaze, augmented with legilimency, piercing into each individual seated around him. He said nothing for the longest time, dragging out the moment. Lucius recognized it for the scare tactic it was and maintained his nonchalant posture while the others squirmed.

“I must confess myself pleased to see that so many of you have returned to the fold,” a collective sigh went up in the room but Lucius knew better than to believe their power-mad despot would leave it at that, “though you should not have been faithless enough to have left in the first place.”

The man next to him began visibly trembling. “Fortunately, I am merciful. It is only through my mercy that many of you yet breath. It is my mercy that grants you the privilege of serving me. Even the Potter boy shall soon be ready to fulfill my wishes.”

He favored the half-empty table with a withering look. “We shall need to swell our ranks before that happens. Avery? MacNair?” They turned to look at their leader as other eyes in the room fell on them. Lucius heard Avery swallow hard before they both spoke. “Yes, my Lord?”

“You will both work on freeing our captured brothers and sisters. I want it done soon. In this way, you may begin to redeem yourselves for your past failures.” Both men answered quickly, relieved at their Dark Lord’s decree.

“Lucius?” His head swiveled to face the head of the table. He kept his voice even and curious, but respectful. “Yes, my Lord?” He could feel his mind being probed but gave no reaction to it.

“As my decisions, somehow, not to your liking?” The Dark Lord’s challenge had not been unanticipated, but Lucius wasn’t as weak-willed as his fellow Death Eaters.

“Not at all, my Lord. Avery and MacNair are both suitable choices. They should perform admirably.”

His voice grew even more quiet and dangerous. “I do not speak of that. You sent Draco away. This, after I had begun paving the way for his induction into our ranks. I had thought you would have wanted him to assume a greater role in our endeavours.”

“My Lord, my decision to move my son had everything to do with the current situation at Hogwarts, I assure you. The Ministry’s puppet is unstable, her appointment, something I would expect from Bella’s warped mind, not the minister’s.” Several chuckles followed but were quickly silenced when the Dark Lord’s unwanted attention had been drawn. “As for joining us, regrettably he still has much to learn,” Lucius continued, “before he will be a useful asset to the cause. He is not the wizard I was at his age.”

The Dark Lord was not yet assuaged. “Then you should have sent him to Durmstrang.”

“I am afraid Durmstrang’s reputation is no longer what it was, my Lord. Besides, I doubt there is anything of the Dark Arts they could teach him that we could not.”

“So, you chose Beauxbatons because?”

“They excel at wandless magic, my Lord.” The lie was smooth on his tongue, readily delivered. “Were he to master such a difficult concept at such a young age, combined with what we can teach
him, he would be a formidable opponent against your enemies when he is ready.”

To Lucius, the Dark Lord still seemed suspicious, but he continued, and at length, ended the meeting with a dismissive wave of his hand. Lucius didn’t breathe easily, and he didn’t let his guard down until he was safely behind the protective wards of Malfoy Manor. Despite the danger, he didn’t regret defying the Dark Lord. He had made a decision long ago, a whispered promise as he cradled a sleeping newborn against his chest.

When Lucius had found out he was going to be a father, he had sworn then and there that he would be different from his own. He remembered so clearly that summer evening, when the Dark Lord was not yet gone, and to even think the words he spoke aloud was considered treason. Fresh from a shower to scrub off the blood, and exhausted from the evening’s battle, he had found himself wandering the manor halls, barefoot and shirtless, sleeping pants slung low on his hips. He had been standing in the nursery staring down at Draco before he had even realized it, and as if sensing his presence, Draco had let out a tiny mewl and started to fuss. Lucius had picked him up without thought, shushing him as he held him close.

He had cradled him, his eyelids heavy with exhaustion, thinking about how much things had changed in the scant weeks since he had been born. The Dark Lord's hold over him had begun to wane, and he had begun to think about what exactly it was that the Dark Lord gave him, and what he would have to give up to maintain it. Lucius had quickly come to the realization that it wasn't even a question. He hadn't even been able to contemplate offering his precious son up to the monster he served. How his own father had reached such a different conclusion was an utter mystery. Draco had fallen back asleep, his tiny hand clutching at him with its death grip in his chest hair. Lucius had been half asleep himself, and maybe that was why he had felt bold enough to whisper his treasonous thoughts aloud.

“I won't let him have you too.”

He hadn't even realized Narcissa was there, not until he had felt her tuck his hair behind his ear, and kiss his brow lightly. Their eyes had met, Draco between them, and Narcissa had simply nodded in tacit approval, smiling down at him. Lucius had known then, that to protect Draco, to keep him safe from the Dark Lord, he would do whatever was necessary.

He had known they both would.

Lucius slipped out of his Death Eater robes carelessly, the wound on his back splitting open at last. He ignored the blood soaking through his shirt, making a beeline for his ledger instead, in order to start work on the next phase of his plan.

Chapter End Notes

I was kind of interested to write some Draco/Hermione interactions, but I fully believe that if Lucius was opposing Voldemort, he would ship Draco as far away from him as possible.
Hermione fell back into her familiar school routine. It was comforting in its own way, to walk into her classes and know exactly what to expect. It wasn’t all great, though. Educational Decree Number 25 had all her teachers noticeably on edge, even Snape and McGonagall, the most defiant of the lot. With McGonagall, it was subtle, her words chosen with more care. The content of her classes didn’t suffer one bit, she just adeptly skipped off the line of unacceptability according to the decree. Snape, instead, lashed out at the students, and it were they, not him who chose their words with more care rather than risk his wrath.

As comforting as the routine of her day was, Hermione was relieved to be back in the Gryffindor common area at the end of each day. The chilled atmosphere of the school was somewhat lessened in rooms that felt like home. In fact, the conversations around her were fairly normal. A group of girls, her roommates she noticed as she looked up, were giggling near the fireplace, passing a magazine back and forth between them, and Hermione could guess what type from their scandalized squeals.

She had been back five days and was woefully disappointed in her lack of progress. It was irrational, and she knew that Lucius had been working on this particular problem for years, but she wouldn't be Hermione Granger if she didn't worry about letting others down, about not stepping up to the occasion and doing her part.

Snippets of the conversation floated her way, and Hermione found herself involuntarily listening to it rather than concentrating on her assignments. “Wouldn’t something that big be rather uncomfortable?” That voice would be Sally-Anne Perks. She was nice, if a bit quiet for the most part.

“What would you know about any of it,” Parvati piped up, and Hermione found herself involuntarily listening to it rather than concentrating on her assignments. “Wouldn’t something that big be rather uncomfortable?” That voice would be Sally-Anne Perks. She was nice, if a bit quiet for the most part.

“Dean’s nearly that big,” Lavender chimed in.

“Oh, how would you know,” Hermione thought with exasperation. Everyone knew Lavender’s gossip far outstripped her experience. Dean wouldn’t even be interested in someone like Lavender.

“Will you know about any of it,” Parvati piped up, and Hermione smiled at the thought of Lavender finally being called out, “bookworm?” She looked up quickly at the familiar nickname, suddenly realizing that she must have made some type of noise because they were all looking at her, and she suddenly wished the floor would open up and swallow her.

“Oh, bollocks! Hermione thought. How am I going to fix this? “Well I don’t,” she stammered, “I just, I don’t think Lavender would know anything like that about Dean, either.”

“I’ll have you know,” Lavender defended herself in a huff, “that my information comes directly from a reliable source.” Lavender smirked at her, narrowing her eyes, as though daring her to object.

Lily Moon was staring at her strangely throughout the exchange, and Hermione cleared her throat nervously under her intense gaze. “Morgana’s knickers, Hermione! Have you? When?”

“What? No!” Hermione could feel the eyes of the entire group trained on her. She could sense the shift taking place and didn’t believe at this point that there was any way she could get out of the conversation with her secret intact. Cringing inwardly at the lack of situational awareness that had landed her in her current predicament, Hermione scrambled to come up with something believable.
There was no way she could or would tell them the entire truth, including just of whom she had such intimate knowledge. That would send Lucius to prison and all but guarantee mission failure. Giving them just enough information to sate their curiosity seemed her only option at this point but then she couldn’t seem too eager to tell them either. Hermione closed her eyes with a groan, burying her head in her hands, and wanting to kick herself. She really needed to get her exclamations, reactions, and the talking to herself under control. And she had thought she was doing so well.

“Hermione!” Sally-Anne sounded positively scandalized, “just who have you been getting it on with!? Harry?” She was dragged unceremoniously into the circle of girls surrounding the fireplace.

“No,” Lily interjected excitedly, “it must have been Ron.” Hidden behind her hand, Hermione missed the dark look that crossed Lavender’s features.

Parvati began grilling her, the questions coming at such a rapid-fire pace, it made her head spin. “Is he even in Gryffindor? Is it a Ravenclaw? A Hufflepuff? Or are you slumming it with a Slytherin?”

“Is he even a boy?” she added almost as an afterthought.

“No, he’s not a student here.” Hermione began, extreme hesitation evident in her voice. She was careful to put the stresses on the correct words to make it seem like he could have been a student elsewhere. At least then, her nosy roommates couldn’t go around asking people at school.

“So who is he then?”

“Just someone I knew when I was younger. I hadn't seen him in a while and we reconnected over the holidays.” Not really a complete lie because she was still so terrible at it. “And I don’t want this all over the school. If a single word gets out…”

“Fine,” Lavender said with frustration, “go on then. We won’t tell anyone. It won’t leave this circle. Promise.” The rest of them nodded their agreement.

“He was ahead of me at school, before I came to Hogwarts.” Give or take a couple of decades.

“An older boy then?” Hermione nodded. Much older, but definitely not a boy.

“You’re sure you’re talking about a real guy? Cause you never really seem interested.” Parvati’s tone was skeptical, indicating her supreme disbelief.

Hermione glared daggers at her, rubbing her hand over the fading bruise on her shoulder absently. She hadn’t planned on providing solid proof but her Gryffindor pride couldn’t let Parvati’s accusation slide, couldn't allow her to insinuate that she was a liar. Without further thought, she tugged her collar away from her neck, reveling in the shocked faces around her.

Then they all started talking at once, questions coming at her faster than she could respond until she held her hands up, gesturing for silence. When the commotion died down, Lavender responded first, “So details?”

“Well, it was good. I mean, it was really good.”

“Come on. You can’t just leave it at that, Hermione. Give us some real details,” Lily urged.

“Well, he was sweet,” the news was greeted with a collection of awws, “but he could also be really naughty too. Some of the things he said during… well they were downright filthy,” and the other girls giggled excitedly behind their hands. Hermione smiled wistfully. He had truly shown her both
ends of the spectrum.

Hermione thought for a moment. Was she actually willing to tell these girls what Lucius had done to her? She could possibly have gotten away with remaining quite vague, but there was one thing she seriously wanted to know, a question she needed answered even though he had seemed eager enough.

“Has anyone ever used their mouth on you before? You know, between- between your legs.” Hermione asked, hesitantly. She received a chorus of shaking heads in return and only one affirmative nod.

“Most boys hate it. It’s like they think it’s icky or something,” Parvati answered. "Girls on the other hand..."

“Only they certainly don’t mind you doing it to them,” Lavender added. The other girls, minus Sally-Anne, rolled their eyes in annoyance. It sounded like she had made the right call in approaching Lucius before coming back.

“Well,” Hermione began, “he seemed to love it.”

Lily seemed skeptical, “How do you know?”

Hermione glanced around the common room to make sure no one was in earshot before answering, her voice pitched low and conspiratorial anyway. “He told me he wanted me to drown him with my cunt and then he practically dove in. He was quite good at it, too.” Her words elicited shocked gasps and Parvati began fanning herself furiously.

“So, was this guy your first?” Jealousy was clearly evident in Lavender’s voice.

“Yeah. I hadn’t planned to do anything over break. It just kind of happened.”

“Did it hurt? I’ve heard it hurts the first time.” Sally-Anne sounded worried.

“I thought it would, but it was really just a bit uncomfortable at first. I mean, I suppose it could have, but he did take his time, though, before... And he didn’t rush anything.” She smiled, remembering. “It was amazing actually.”

“Well he must have been on the small side then,” Lily stated dismissively. Someone shoved the magazine at her, “Show us!” but Hermione wasn’t sure who said it as she glanced down at the moving pictures before her. The magazine was still opened to the page they had been tittering over when she had so inelegantly drawn attention to herself. Neither of the two men in the looped full page images were as well-endowed as Lucius was.

Hermione flipped the page. “They’re all different,” she said with a shrug, her cheeks going a bit pink.

“Oh, quit stalling and just find one that’s close,” Lily insisted.

Hermione rolled her eyes, flipped back to the front, and looked through each image, pausing for just a moment as her eyes landed on the title of one particular article. Finally, settling on a dark-haired wizard to further throw off her roommates, Hermione said, “This one’s a bit too slender, and he didn’t curve like this, but,” she cleared her throat in embarrassment, “the length looks about right,” she added in a rush. She could feel how red her face was.

Lavender snatched the magazine away, studying it closely. “Really? Cause this one is about eight
Hermione nodded her confirmation.

“You’re trying to tell me, that your mystery man was that big, and it didn’t hurt your first time?” She smiled conspiratorially. “I’d like to meet him.”

Hermione rolled her eyes again. Granted, she didn’t know him that well, but she was fairly certain Lucius wouldn’t want to get anywhere near Lavender. Hermione still didn’t know why he had even deigned to touch her. Just then, masculine laughter echoed through the room as the door swung open and Hermione scrambled back to the table she had been working at before getting pulled into the other girls’ gossip. Shooting them all a dark look, she hastily tugged her shirt back into place, covering her fading bruise and bent back over her work.

Harry and Ron sat down opposite and beside her, respectively, a few minutes later. They chatted quietly about Quidditch while she worked, keeping their voices low in an effort not to disturb her. When she looked up at them, a half hour had gone by and Harry was absently rubbing at the back of his hand. “Umbridge again?” He nodded at her. “I’m telling you, Harry, you need to take it to Dumbledore.”

“He’s preoccupied. I get the feeling he wants nothing to do with me right now,” and he flopped back into the chair, indicating the subject was closed.

Hermione shook her head in exasperation. The boys could be so stubborn and difficult at times. She hoped he came round, because Dumbledore needed to know. Although, if Lucius was right, and Dumbledore did keep a close eye on Harry, then he knew already, and had chosen to do nothing. She hoped that wasn’t the case.

“Well,” she said, feigning a yawn, “I’m off to bed. See you two tomorrow.” The boys bid her goodnight and settled into their chairs to continue chatting before they too headed off to their respective beds.

Hermione was far from sleepy. She just preferred not to do her mission research as she called it in the common area. Tonight’s near disaster of a conversation reassured her that it was a smart decision on her part. She changed into her pajamas and crawled beneath the covers, pulling her leather journal from underneath her pillow and settled back against the headboard.

The amulet’s inscriptions had proven to be incredibly tricky to decipher. She had been working on it every night in the five days she had been back, which she found frustrating. She had been planning to solve it in two. The runes, though, were an obscure form of ancient Norse, many of the necessary translations mouldering in some of the oldest books Hogwarts’ library had to offer.

The books hadn’t been easy to get a hold of either. Umbridge had always seemed to be hovering around, watching her when she had tried checking anything out. She assumed it was because she was friends with Harry and he was squarely in Umbridge’s sights. She was still working on how to sneak about the castle so that she could begin checking off her to-do list. She couldn’t borrow Harry’s cloak too often or he would get suspicious and demand to know what she was up to. Worse still, he would want to tag along.

The other girls had long since gone to bed, and the candle on Hermione’s nightstand was burning low as she continued translating. She was thinking that she should probably turn in for the night as she scribbled down a notation and rubbed at her tired eyes with a true yawn.

Looking down at the page full of her neat and orderly penmanship, a frown creased her brow. She
tilted her head to the side as if looking at it from a slightly different angle would suddenly change what she had just written down. Hermione sat bolt upright, fumbling as quietly as possible for a new candle from her night stand. Grasping the gem, she held it up to the candlelight, to better see the inscriptions, turning it this way and that, *looking through it*, as she rearranged the written words into a different order that better matched with the lines carved into the stone.

“That wanker,” she hissed under her breath as she stared dumbfounded at the emerald she held. Hermione had no doubt Lucius had paid ten thousand galleons for it from whatever black-market dealer he had purchased it from. What she doubted was that he had purchased it on a whim, because it certainly was no trinket. No, she was absolutely sure he had purchased it specifically for her, for their mission. Hermione laughed softly to herself and put it and her journal away, blowing out the candle for the night. She would test it out tomorrow and see if it actually worked. It wasn’t a time turner or an invisibility cloak but then, if her translations were right and it did work, it didn’t have to be either. It was something potentially much better.

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Lucius rapped on the door of the portkey office, and waited. It was after hours, thirty minutes past, just as he had been instructed. He hoped the official had not changed her mind and that he had not been stood up, or worse, that there were aurors waiting for him behind the closed door. The lock clicked just as he lifted his cane to knock again, and the door swung open, revealing an exhausted-looking portkey official. She stood aside, beckoning Lucius inside, and closed the door behind him once he had entered.

He glanced around the office, but didn’t see any aurors waiting to arrest him.

“You can relax, Mr. Malfoy. No one else is coming.” She sighed wearily. “Part of the reason I’m entertaining you today. Do sit,” she said, waving her hand at an empty chair in front of her desk, and took her own seat.

He slid into the offered chair gracefully. “What we discussed previously…”

“Still doable, of course. I assume you brought a suitable item for use.”

He reached into his jacket pocket, and set a small wooden box on the desk between them. The official slid the box closer, opening the lid to peer inside. She lifted a skeptical eyebrow, her gaze shooting to Lucius’ own.

“At least you say it with conviction, which is more than I can say for most.”

She closed the box with a tiny chuckle of disbelief. “At least you say it with conviction, which is more than I can say for most.”

She opened a drawer, and pulled out a folded piece of parchment, sliding it across the desk to him. “What is this?” he asked, unfolding it warily, his eyes narrowed suspiciously at her the entire time.

“My terms. Updated.”

“We had an agreement,” he said, his voice low with anger.

“Supply and demand, Mr. Malfoy. You understand the concept. When last we came to terms, my
boss hadn’t reamed me for situations beyond my control. When last we came to terms, the portkey in question, was meant for you.” She indicated the box. “You can pretend all you like, but I’ve been doing this long enough to know better. I believe you’ll find my terms acceptable, a little steep perhaps, but what you’re asking for is highly illegal. I wouldn’t dream of trying to cheat you, though. Your reputation precedes you.”

Lucius read over her list of demands, and they were steep, but not unreasonably so, and then he reached the end of the list, his eyes falling to the hastily scrawled addendum. The ink hadn’t even been dry when she had put it away.

“So I am meant to hire you, when I know for a fact that you engage in illegal activity? That you sell secrets to the highest bidder?”

“You’re engaging in the same activity, Mr. Malfoy. You’ve looked around this office,” she said, waving her hand to indicate the utter lack of activity. “How many other employee desks did you see? Yet I’m sure you can imagine the sheer number of portkey applications we get on a daily basis.”

Lucius inclined his head in acknowledgement. He could well imagine. The answer was far too many for what appeared to be a maximum of four employees. “True, but how can I trust you?”

“Aside from the fact that you don’t trust people anyway? With me, you know what you’re getting. Besides, I only engage in shady behavior when I’m overworked and underpaid. How do you tend to treat your employees, Mr. Malfoy?”

He glanced down at the parchment in his hand again. If his reputation preceded him, then the question was rhetorical. “This request is vague. Tell me exactly what it is that you want.”

“Fair compensation for my work. I’m not looking for special accommodations. Wherever you choose to place me is entirely up to you.”

Lucius considered her request. She was smart enough to give him free reign over her future with Malfoy Industries rather than dictate any demands in consideration for the way she had sprung her request on him. He appreciated that. She was also clearly comfortable working in the shadows; a quality he could put to use.

“And should I agree to these new terms, what happens then?”

She allowed herself a small smile of relief that he hadn’t chosen to back out of their deal. Lucius wasn’t entirely sure that he wanted to quash that kind of reaction. It did make her easier for him to read, but it could also be considered a liability in certain situations. Something he would have to consider for the future.

“I would make your portkey, as agreed, and bury the paperwork. In the eyes of the ministry, it would not exist. Once I am installed in a position of your choosing at your company, I will hand over your new portkey. Simple.”

Lucius stood, extending his hand across the desk with a smile of his own. “Your terms are acceptable. Expect an official offer through proper channels early next week. Welcome aboard.”

Hermione had intended to test the amulet out in potions class. She hadn’t gathered the nerve to test it out in potions class. Well she had, but just as she had braced herself to raise her hand and request to use the bathroom, Neville had somehow managed to knock his book off onto the floor, taking
out half the instruments on his table in the same fell swoop. Professor Snape had rounded on the poor kid, berating him for his clumsiness.

Not that it had been easy before, but Professor Snape’s class under the watchful eye of Dolores Umbridge had turn downright hellish. He was quicker to anger, quicker to assign massive, even by his standards, punishment papers, and the cauldrons positively sparkled due to the mass number of detentions meted out for the smallest infractions.

“You find my lesson boring today, Mr. Longbottom?” Hermione wondered which one it would be today.

“N-no, professor,” Neville stammered out, afraid to look up from where he was frantically attempting to clean up his mess.

“Yet you feel the need to interrupt my class. Stop fiddling about.” The one remaining, intact vial, slipped from Neville’s fingers to shatter on the floor. He cringed as he glanced fearfully at Professor Snape. Snape held his gaze in a withering look for long moments. He opened his mouth to speak in his eloquent, drawling voice. Hermione could see him forming the word ‘detention’. In the half-second before he gave voice to the word, a clatter sounded behind her. Professor Snape’s piercing stare slid from Neville, passed over her in chilling slow motion, and landed on his second victim.

“I mistakenly believed that my early lessons on respecting your equipment were well-learnt. It would appear that is not the case with you Gryffindors.” He pinned each student wearing a red and gold tie with that same penetrating gaze as he said this. “I will require, on my desk by Monday, three rolls of parchment from each of you on the proper care of magical instruments with particular emphasis on issues arising from the use of damaged equipment, including examples, and documented cases. Sources properly cited.” He turned with a flourish of his robes, striding quickly back to the front of the room. When Crabbe and Goyle began snickering at their helpless classmates, Professor Snape stopped in his tracks but did not turn around. “And four rolls of parchment from each Slytherin student on the same subject.” He finished his journey to the lectern, resuming his lesson as a collective groan resounded throughout the Slytherin students present. Apparently, some of the protections afforded to Professor Snape’s favored house had disappeared with Draco’s departure.

It was now her last chance to try out the amulet before dinner time and she hoped her translations were accurate. The door to Professor McGonagall’s classroom closed behind her and Hermione checked the hallway in both directions twice to ensure that no one was around. Her hand delved beneath her tie, snuck between two of the buttons on her blouse, and grasped the emerald lying heavy and warm against her sternum. With a deep breath, she whispered aloud an ancient norse phrase she had translated to mean ‘cloak me in shadow’. A slight tingle ghosted over her skin but nothing else happened. She didn’t really know what she was expecting but for ten thousand galleons, she had expected a little more. She had expected to be able to tell for certain whether or not it was working at the least.

With shaking hands, she released the gem clutched tightly under her shirt. There was only one way to find out. She turned back around, pushed the door open gingerly, and walked through. She didn’t realize she was holding her breath until her chest began to feel constricted. Hermione exhaled slowly, looking to the front of the classroom where Professor McGonagall continued as if she didn’t notice the interruption. That in itself, wasn’t highly unusual, so Hermione would need to do something quite dramatic if she wanted certainty that the amulet worked.

She stepped to the side and slammed her hand down on the desk in front of where a fellow student
was scribbling down some rather atrocious-looking notes. The student furrowed his brow, shaking his head a bit, but kept on scribbling and nothing else changed. Neither McGonagall, nor the student in front of her, nor anyone else looked at her. They all carried on as if she wasn’t even there. She tried jumping up and down. She uttered a short, but quite loud yell. She screamed out the answer to McGonagall’s question, posed to the room, at the top of her lungs. Nothing.

She practically skipped out of the classroom, giddy with excitement at what it meant. Once the door had closed back behind her, she grabbed the gemstone, glanced around at the empty hall and with a huge smile on her face, whispered breathily the release phrase meaning ‘bare my flesh’. That same tingle washed over her as before. Hermione wiped the smile off her face as she re-entered the classroom, several people looking up at her entrance.

The amulet would definitely come in handy for sneaking around the castle.
It hadn’t been easy to concentrate in her classes the following day. Now that she had a means of getting around the school grounds undetected, she was eager to get started doing just that, but there was planning to be done first. She still had to be careful as the extent of the amulet’s properties were still an unknown. She had come across no mention of it yet, but if Lucius had sent it with her, it must have been capable of getting the job done.

Hermione pushed open the door of Professor Flitwick’s classroom, Harry and Ron talking animatedly close by her side. Her mind was only half on the conversation. They were all huddled together in the crowded hallway, not only so they wouldn’t be separated, but also so they could hear each other over the din of fellow students hurrying between classes. As Hermione was about to interject, a shout sounded out behind her, “Hermione! Wait up!”

All three stopped suddenly, nearly getting trampled by the throng of students trying to pass by. They stepped back against the wall, tucking into a small alcove to wait for the other student to make it to their location. Pushing through the crowd, Cormac McLaggen was slightly out of breath when he finally approached. “Hey, Hermione,” he beamed at her, “I was hoping to have a word.”

She glanced at her two best friends. Harry looked nonplussed, but Ron was glaring daggers at Cormac. Actually, Ron always seemed to be glaring at someone now that she thought about it.

“Um, what did you want to talk about?” she asked, ignoring the boys. Hermione couldn’t remember if Cormac had ever said a single word to her in all the years they had been at school together.

“Well,” Cormac started, glancing over at her companions. He didn’t seem bothered by Ron’s rudeness at all. “It's actually private.”

“We'll go on ahead if you want, save you a seat,” Harry stated with a quick grin, tugging on Ron’s sleeve. Ron sputtered incoherently, and Harry earned a dark look for his efforts.

The entire exchange between her two best friends irritated Hermione, and it suddenly made her realize that she was through pining after Ron. She felt nothing but annoyance at his presumption. If he wouldn’t even step up to tell her how he felt, he had no right getting hurt when another guy might, not that Hermione felt he had any right in the first place. Harry was still looking to her for confirmation and she looked back over at Cormac, and from the exchange, could now guess what was on his mind.

*Why not*? she thought. It wouldn't hurt to hear him out. She doubted anything would come of it, but then she wouldn't know for sure if she didn't take the chance to find out.

“Uh, yeah,” she replied, “I’ll catch you up.” And with that, both Harry dragged Ron away by his collar, and the both disappeared in the sea of students.

“Well I’m sure you've guessed why I stopped you.” He said once they’d gone and the crowd of bodies around them had begun to disperse.
“Yeah, I did. I was just kind of wondering… why.” If her roommates had anything to do with it, they were absolutely going to regret it.

“You know, I don’t know really. I had to get a book for Snape’s paper, and you were there in the library, studying or something. Can’t really explain it.” He shrugged nonchalantly. “I’ve just been thinking about it since then, and well it just seemed like a good time if that makes any sense. So, I thought we could go into Hogsmeade. Maybe Friday evening after classes? I know it’s short notice—”

“Actually, Friday's the only time I have free this weekend. So, that’s fine.” It worked out perfectly, in fact. If she went into Hogsmeade on Friday, she could beg off with homework when Harry and Ron wanted to go on Saturday. It would free up her weekend immensely.

He flashed that confident smile at her again. “Great. Meet you after classes then?”

“Sounds good. I’ll see you then.”

The hallway was nearly empty as Hermione made her way to her next class. She was in no real hurry, certain Professor Binns wouldn’t even notice her lateness. He seldom noticed anything. As she made her way toward the classroom, she hummed softly to herself. She didn’t know if Cormac was her type. She doubted, but she didn’t truly know. A month ago, if anyone had asked her opinion, she would have probably laughed in their face, but then a certain Slytherin, who she was more fond of than she really should have been, had upended her world. Now she couldn't help but wonder if maybe there was some weird thing that she and Cormac would have in common. They had been put into the same house after all. There had to be a reason for that.

More than anything else, Hermione was happy to have finally let go of her crush on Ron. She felt a bit silly that it had taken so long to see how he treated any potential rival for her attention. Ron had never made his own intentions known, but had tried to drive others away. He had done it to Viktor even though he had idolized him.

None of that mattered now. Hermione wasn't carrying a torch for Ron any longer, and a trip into Hogsmeade sounded nice. She now had plans that weekend that involved her amulet and the headmaster’s office. A nice evening out beforehand was just the thing.

“I don’t know what she could possibly see in him anyway,” Ron was saying, a little too loudly Harry thought. “He’s a meathead.”

“So, when were you going to ask her out then?” Harry asked a bit harsher than he had intended. He was getting tired of it though, the way Ron got pouty whenever someone else showed the slightest bit of interest in their friend. “She doesn’t owe you anything, and she’s not going to wait for you to grow a spine.”

“Oh, that’s rich coming from you,” Ron replied angrily, tossing his books onto the tabletop. “How long did it take you to work up the nerve to talk to Cho?”

“I didn’t say I did it right but if you don’t watch your attitude, you’re going to end up damaging your friendship.” Harry took his seat before finishing. “Is that what you really want? For her to never talk to you again?”

“No,” Ron’s voice had a somewhat defeated quality to it.

“If it doesn’t work out with Cormac, ask her, but you have got to stop acting like a jealous
boyfriend. You’re not dating, and she wouldn’t appreciate it even if you were.” Ron nodded his head solemnly but didn’t say anything else. Harry wasn’t sure if he had gotten through to his friend or not, because Ron could be incredibly stubborn when he wanted to be.

When she slid into the bench across from Harry at breakfast Saturday morning, Ron had a mouthful of something, as usual. He looked like a chipmunk as he stuffed in more sausages before he had even finished swallowing. She had always found it rather disgusting.

“So, how did your date go?” She turned toward Harry. Thankfully, Ron was sitting beside rather than across from her. She had figured that out early on as the best way to keep her breakfast down. It worked so long as someone else didn’t beat her to it, because she wasn’t the only one who had figured out the trick. Ginny was typically her fiercest competitor.

“Well, he talked about sports, mostly Quidditch.” She pulled a plate closer and began filling it as she spoke. The sports talk had been punctuated with many awkward silences. “I mean, it wasn’t absolutely horrid. He just…” She shrugged. “He wasn’t like Lucius,” she finished in her head. When she hadn’t been planning her reconnaissance weekend in her head, it had been her one overriding thought all through their meal. Lucius had engaged her on more than just one topic, and he had proven himself capable of holding his own during their academic discussions. In fact, he had challenged her on more than one point. Cormac was a one a trick pony, and it wasn’t a trick she found particularly intriguing.

“So, does that mean you’re going out with him again or not?” Ron paused in his furious chewing to listen to her answer.

“I don’t know. I really doubt he’ll even ask me.”

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure he’ll ask,” Harry replied, focused on something behind her. She turned around to see Cormac looking in their direction from across the hall. When he saw that she noticed him, he lifted his arm, waving at her with a grin. In a few years, that grin might take on a more arrogant appearance, but then, it also might not. She had certainly never anticipated her current role in the ensuing war. There was no telling what the future held for any of them. Hermione waved back sheepishly, unsure how he could have thought their date had gone well, she barely been paying attention, before turning back to her meal.

The ritual flurry signaling the arrival of the morning post interrupted them before any more questions about her love life could be posed.

As soon as the owls had dropped off their many packages, the murmur in the hall kicked up almost instantly. Hermione paused mid-bite and looked up at the bleak faces around her. Even Ron had stopped stuffing himself and was devouring the front page of the *Daily Prophet* instead, a disturbed look on his face. Hermione dropped her fork, the bit of egg attached bouncing off and onto the table, and all but ripped open her own copy of the paper. Ten black-and-white faces stared back at her beneath the chilling headline. *Really*, Hermione corrected herself, *only the first four words are chilling.*

She shoved it towards Harry, waiting for him to finish reading, and wondered how this sudden turn of events was going to affect what she was doing with Lucius. Voldemort was stepping up and making moves. He was building up his forces, but did that mean something was going to happen soon? Was Lucius a part of it? The thought flitted through her mind that she was putting an awful lot of trust in a Death Eater, and that maybe that trust was misplaced, but she quickly banished the notion. She had enough evidence to send him to Azkaban right now. That demonstrated a lot of
trust in her. Hermione resolved to hit the books harder, get into Dumbledore’s office, and just hope that she received word from Lucius soon. She needed to know what was going on out there.

Following the news in the morning paper, Hermione had forced herself to finish her breakfast quickly, and left the great hall in a rush. She ducked into the nearest alcove, grasped her amulet tightly, and murmured the activation word, feeling the ghostly tingle wash over her. Students began filing out of the hall right behind her, laughter echoing off the stone walls in gleeful anticipation of a day out, off school grounds. The teaching staff and Professor Dumbledore were not far behind, and with a nervous breath, Hermione fell into step close behind the headmaster.

She followed him through the winding halls of the school until they came at last to his door. He glanced around, suspiciously Hermione thought, though it could have been her nerves showing. She held her breath anyway, just in case. The headmaster turned back, not soon enough for her liking, but he seemed satisfied, and opened the entrance with the password ‘fizzy pops’. The stone gargoyle slid aside revealing the staircase, and Hermione quickly ducked around Professor Dumbledore, careful not to brush against his robes.

Hermione stayed well ahead of him, eyeing Fawkes suspiciously as she emerged into the headmaster’s office. He was preening his feathers, and continued to do so, but she moved into a far corner away from the Phoenix to wait out the headmaster. She was pleased to note that none of the many portraits on the walls paid her any mind either. They were a factor she had forgotten about.

It was over two hours before he finally left, and another five minutes before she worked the pins and needles out of her legs. He had taken his time, but not really done much of anything as far as she could tell. A Floo call with what she thought was an old acquaintance had taken up about half an hour, but the rest of the time he had puttered around like- well like an old man, fussing over Fawkes until the bird had fallen asleep. Hermione was somewhat disturbed by his behavior considering what was going on at Hogwarts this year.

She had decided not to dwell on it though. He could return at any time, and she had to finish her search before he got back. She might not get another chance later on.

There was a lot to look through. Professor Dumbledore’s office resembled nothing so much as an old antique shop like the kind her parents used to drag her to, only filled with strange magical oddities rather than porcelain cats and tea cups. She decided to start in her corner, as good a place as any to start, and began checking each item against her mental list, passing her wand over each individual item. Lucius had told her that he could sometimes feel the dark magic in the diary, but sometimes wasn't that helpful. The restricted section had once again come in handy, a suitable detection spell tucked away in one of the old books, but none of the items were reporting back as dark in any way. There were certainly powerful artefacts, lending weight to Lucius’ assertions that Hogwarts and the headmaster’s office in particular served as a kind of vault for dangerous magical items, but nothing, it seemed, that even remotely came close to something like a horcrux.

Hermione’s wand didn’t so much as twitch until she came upon the bookshelf, and then it practically flew out of her hand. Her elation was short-lived as she eagerly read over the spines of each leather bound book, and understood why her spell had worked. An entire library of books on dark magic resided on Dumbledore’s shelves, and among them, two of the three books Lucius had made her read, including Secrets of the Darkest Art, the book containing the instructions on how to make a horcrux. Had Professor Dumbledore removed the books from the library to keep the information out of students’ hands? Did that mean he knew what Voldemort had done?

Some of the portraits began waking up which led Hermione to think that the headmaster could be
Hermione crawled into her bed, exhausted, and yet the ghost of a satisfied smile tugged at her lips despite the day’s awful and disappointing news. She had spent the rest of the evening after searching the headmaster’s office in the library, and her shoulders and neck were stiff, but she didn’t care. It was a small price to pay for unfettered access to the restricted section. Whether he knew it or not, though Hermione suspected he did, Lucius had given her something incredibly precious. He had given her the ability to seek out all her own answers to the burning questions she had and even though she felt uncertain regarding the new developments revealed at breakfast, she felt content as well. Hermione glanced around at her sleeping roommates. She hadn’t yet deactivated the amulet and one of those burning questions was nagging at her brain, but it wasn’t an answer she would find in the library. Throwing the covers to the side, she padded across the room and retrieved the magazine from Lavender’s not-so-secret stash. Settling back down, she quickly flipped to the article that had caught her attention before: *When Your Partner Wants to Play... Exploring your secret kinky fantasies.* The accompanying looped photo showed a handsome wizard, silk gag tied around his mouth, pulling futilely at the rope bonds securing him to the four corners of a bed. There was no sound, but Hermione could imagine the man’s muffled scream as his companion gripped his testicles tightly and delivered a sharp, controlled slap to the shaft of his cock, causing the wizard’s body to jerk with arousal. The look on his face of equal parts pain and lust stirred her own arousal, and Hermione snaked a hand down between her legs, finding herself quickly growing wet, as her thumb brushed against her clit.

She tried to imagine herself with someone like Cormac, and then with someone like Ron, but she couldn’t picture either of them that way, and her tenuous hold on the fantasy faltered. The conjured image of Lucius came to mind much more easily. She knew it was impossible for Lucius to have worn her impromptu markings openly, but Hermione wondered if he had wanted to. She had been sorely tempted herself and lamented her own now-faded bruises. Closing her eyes, Hermione recalled Lucius’ shredded body and imagined what it would feel like to mark a man on purpose and stake her claim no matter how temporary. What would it feel like, she wondered, to have a man completely at her mercy? She knew what it felt like to be completely at his. Lucius had given her a taste of that already. The strong desire to dominate wasn’t something she had ever considered before. Previously she had thought about how sweet and tender Ron’s kisses would most likely be, how he would hold her close and say that he loved her. She turned back to the article’s accompanying photo. After the experiences Lucius had introduced her to, she no longer thought she wanted those things from Ron, or anyone; not unless she could have the other too.

Hermione devoured the article, her fingers slipping deep inside herself, a certain blond-haired wizard starring in her fantasies.

The boisterous celebration taking place around Lucius had been going on for hours, and had been grating on his nerves for nearly that same length of time. He wasn't especially thrilled that the breakout had been a thundering success. In fact, he had provided as little assistance as possible, by playing the snobby bastard too good to help, in an effort to minimize their success. It just meant more eyes to keep watch on his movements; eyes like those belonging to his sister-in-law.

He had felt those eyes on him most of his life: at Christmas parties, at Hogwarts, at his wedding.
To this day, Lucius didn't know if she had always kept watch over him because she was still angry that his father had chosen Narcissa over her, or that she didn't think he was good enough for her beloved sister. With Bellatrix it could have been either. It could have even been both.

Lucius raised his glass in a toast with a few of his fellow Death Eaters, cracking a cruel joke at Rabastan’s expense, and smirking before sipping at his whiskey. Not one for celebration that didn’t involve torturing muggles, the Dark Lord had already left. Bellatrix was his only real remaining concern, and this time, unlike years past, he actually had cause for concern, like a certain item missing from her vault. He had never expected to see Bellatrix again when he had asked Narcissa to retrieve it for him.

The laughter died down as she approached. Lucius didn't know if the other Death Eaters were as wary of her as he was or if they were merely reacting to her tendency to be erratic. Bellatrix had a habit of attacking friend and foe alike with little provocation.

She plucked Rodolphus’ glass from his hand, drained the last of it, and handed it back to him. He accepted it from her sheepishly and made room within their circle for her without a word. For all his cruelty, everyone knew Rodolphus catered to his wife's whims, and that of the two of them, she was worse.

“I hear that you think my nephew is not good enough to join us, Lucius.” And it seemed as if she was going to go straight for the jugular out of the gate. She had always had trouble reigning herself in. It was why she was considered one of their worst torturers. Her savagery usually made up for it, though.

“It's no concern of yours, Bella. Cissa and I will do what is best for our son.” The crowd around them began to disperse slowly, drifting away from the brewing conflict.

“What is best...,” she echoed, “and what exactly is that?”

Lucius smirked, lifting his glass to his lips again. “Was there something you actually wanted? It isn't as if he would know you anyway.”

“Are you still as favored as you once were, dearest brother? Somehow, I don't think so. Something tells me you've fallen.”

“Our Lord's favor is an elusive prize to earn. I serve as I have always done.”

“Do you now?” she asked with interest.

“Of course,” Lucius replied disarmingly, charming as ever.

Bellatrix didn't respond to him. Her mad gaze bore into him, searching, but he knew his secrets were safe. Then she did something that did truly unnerve him. She smiled. And then she laughed.

As she walked away from him, still cackling maniacally, Lucius had the sinking feeling that he had said something terribly wrong.
Dear Old Friend

Chapter Notes

I absolutely love this chapter, especially the Severus/Lucius part, and hope you guys do too! I really feel like I captured their friendship, which I always wondered about since there is a five year age difference between them in the books. Happy reading!

Hermione was beyond frustrated, so much so, that she had actually considered hurling one of her precious books against the wall. She had never considered such a thing before, but coming up empty-handed at every turn was starting to get to her. She needed to talk to Lucius. Hopefully he was having more success than she was. Hopefully he contacted her soon.

Contact.

It was just one more thing that frustrated her. He had said he would be in touch, if it were warranted. He had never said how, but if a mass breakout of Azkaban didn’t qualify as warranted, Hermione didn’t know what would. It had been days since the news broke in the Prophet, nearly a week, and there hadn't been a single word. She knew he was working on his own leads but she was dying to know how his search was going. She tried not to be concerned about not hearing from him, but it was on her mind often. After all, he had managed to get her out of Hogwarts. Contacting her should have been easy, but Hermione couldn't suppress the twinge of worry prodding at her gut.

She slammed the book closed with a little more force than intended, tossing it on the bed. Her journal, she not only hid, but glamoured as well. The books weren’t a big deal and wouldn't arouse suspicion, she had earned her bookworm moniker for a reason after all, but the journal was a different story entirely. Leaving that out was dangerous. She rushed out of her dormitory, down the stairs, and left the common room, heading for the seventh floor. Tonight, she would probably be a little late, but Harry and Ron would just have to deal with running things until she got there.

When she slipped inside the room, the other students were already practicing. Harry’s voice carried to her from across the room, full of praise for something Luna had just done. She stood at the entrance for a minute, just taking everything in, observing. Neville caught her attention. Ever since the mass breakout, he was different; like night and day. There was something in his eyes now, and if it wasn’t a thirst for revenge, it was close. Considering what had happened to his parents, she couldn’t blame him, but he had a focus and intensity that concerned her. She didn’t think Harry or anyone else noticed, not enough to share her concerns anyway. Maybe, she needed to keep an eye on him, just to make sure that focus didn’t turn into something more dangerous.

She looked back to Harry. He had moved on to helping Ernie Macmillan. His eyes were heavily shadowed, most likely due to his private lessons with Professor Snape. She hoped that she didn’t look half as bad once she started training too. Harry looked like he was barely standing today, and it was no wonder why he had asked her and Ron to help him out. Ron looked like the only person who was actually getting a decent night’s rest, though at the moment he looked absolutely miserable as he was currently being tormented by his two brothers. They, at least, seemed to be having a blast. She shook her head at their antics and began to make her way around the room.
The envelope dropped in front of her two days later at breakfast, stirring slightly as an unfamiliar, majestic-looking, slate grey owl landed beside it. It fluttered its wings and looked at her expectantly. Hermione gave it a small treat, which it delicately accepted, though it still didn’t leave. It continued to eye her regally, and Hermione realized it was not going anywhere until it was sure it had completed its delivery. She picked up the envelope bearing only her first name and turned it over to see where it had come from. The wax seal bore no recognizable crests. It was only a stamped in the shape of a diamond, and the wax itself was green.

She had to suppress her exclamation of exhilaration. It had to be the message she had been waiting for.

“Thank you. I’ve got it now,” Hermione said to the owl.

It looked almost as if it nodded at her in acknowledgement and took off, flying through the open window along with the remaining stragglers. When she looked up, her friends were approaching, so she quickly stuffed it into the pocket of her robe.

Ginny was with them.

Hermione had been avoiding her friend somewhat ever since the holiday break. She hadn’t meant to, but she felt guilty that she was working with the man who had caused her friend so much pain as a first-year student. She did miss spending time with Ginny though, and resolved to be less distant in the future. They all sat down with her, piling their plates, and discussing their plans for the coming weekend. Hermione joined in the conversation, and for the time being, the letter remained in her pocket, mostly pushed to the back of her mind, until she could deal with it later.

Once back in Gryffindor tower later that day, Hermione drew the letter from her robes, breaking the seal eagerly. A single, heavy piece of stationery was inside, and she withdrew it, a confused frown creasing her brow for a moment. It wasn’t signed, and no markings identified it in any way. She could well have opened it in the great hall earlier. Umbridge could even have read it over her shoulder and it wouldn’t have mattered. If it had fallen into the wrong hands, it would still have kept its sender’s identity safe. It just meant that it was, unfortunately, another blasted puzzle for her to figure out. Only a single line was written in his neat, flowing script:

034/1630

“Way to be cryptic,” she muttered in exasperation. She had already realized that Lucius was cautious, but it bordered on ridiculous just how far he took it. Still, it was better for them both that he did take it so seriously. As cryptic as it was, he had to have sent her the details for a meeting. The question was when and where. It couldn’t have been meant for that day, because as late as it was, if that were the case, she had already missed it, and Lucius would have had no way of knowing when she would get the chance to read the letter. He wouldn’t leave something so important until the last minute. It just meant that it was, unfortunately, another blasted puzzle for her to figure out. Only a single line was written in his neat, flowing script:

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Hermione worked on the puzzle during Arithmancy the next day, thinking long and hard, trying to narrow down the ‘where’ first. There was no question of if she could solve it. It was specific to her. Lucius meant for her to solve it. She doubted that he wanted to meet her in Hogsmeade or even at the Shrieking Shack. The numbers he’d written just didn’t make sense for a meet there. If it wasn’t either of those two places, the meeting would have to be at Hogwarts and it would have to be on a day when he was supposed to be there. If he made a special trip, it would certainly draw too much attention. Of course, she thought excitedly, it’s got to be the day of the school governors’ meeting.
He was on the board, would have complete access to the school, and the meeting was now less than a week away. That narrowed down practically all of it. She just had to figure out the specific time and location, and she already had a couple of ideas.

Traipsing through mud and filthy water at midnight wasn’t much fun, and if anyone had asked Hermione, she would have told them so emphatically. As a fat water bead dripped from the cavernous ceiling and landed on the top of her head, slithering wetly down the back of her neck, she considered turning right around and returning to the castle proper. Let Lucius take the amulet and retrieve what he wanted if he wanted it so badly. She could go back and spy on Umbridge and Filch; find out what they were up to.

Hermione had seen them conversing as she headed to the bathroom, but they had been too far away for her to hear what they were discussing. Whatever it was, it was certainly bad news for the D.A. and knowing the particulars in advance would have been a boon. She had hovered at the bathroom entrance with the door halfway open, torn between wanting to protect her friends and needing to complete her task. As they had rounded the corner, disappearing from view, she entered the bathroom allowing the door to swing closed behind her. She had crossed the tile to begin searching for the hidden entrance. Myrtle had sniffled, hovering morosely near the second stall, but had paid Hermione no heed as she sought out the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets.

She had never been to the chamber, but Harry and Ron had told her all about how to access it. The light from her wand illuminated her way and she came at last to her destination. She knew the creature was dead. She knew that she needed its fangs since they were the one sure method they had of destroying the horcruxes. That knowledge didn’t make the chamber any less creepy.

“Did you get the wine I sent over last week, Severus?” Lucius stepped into the cramped private sitting area of his oldest and dearest friend’s personal quarters.

It wasn’t particularly small, in fact, it would be considered quite spacious were it not crammed so full of books and parchments. Naturally, everything had a place, and was in its place, but Lucius could never shake the feeling that one day the shelves would give out and it would all come crashing down on top of him and he would die, buried under a pile of rare first edition texts while his oldest friend looked on, a long-suffering expression on his face.

Lucius didn’t even have to imagine the look. Severus was wearing it right now.

“Yes, a lovely vintage and a thoughtful gift. Shall we open it?” Severus replied in a voice that was nearly as unenthused as Lucius had ever heard him. Nearly.

“A splendid idea.” Lucius took a seat in the offered chair at the small table near the fireplace. He glanced around as Severus retrieved the perfectly chilled bottle and two glasses, noting absently that the small table was the only clear surface in the entire room. It somehow seemed more cluttered than the last time.

“That is, after all, the reason you sent it.”

Lucius smiled slyly. “It’s almost like you know me…”

“Almost? You know I seldom drink and the last time you were here, you complained profusely about the ‘swill that the school now serves.’ Your exact words, I believe.” Severus settled into his
own chair and began to pour for them both.

“Yes,” Lucius sneered disdainfully, “this school has seriously gone downhill since the ministry took over.”

Severus huffed and rolled his eyes dramatically. “Nothing has changed.”

“No, something has definitely changed. I can taste it,” he insisted.

“The food and drink are the same as always, Lucius. Umbridge doesn’t have that much influence.”

“Yes,” Lucius sneered disdainfully, “this school has seriously gone downhill since the ministry took over.”

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“The food and drink are the same as always, Lucius. Umbridge doesn’t have that much influence.”

“Yet.” He shot his friend a pointed look, “You know it’s coming as well as I.”

The corner of Severus’ mouth twitched slightly in irritation. “And is Umbridge the reason I lost a promising young Slytherin?” Lucius inclined his head in a manner that Severus could interpret how he chose, but didn’t respond otherwise; merely drained his glass and poured another. They were both, after all, cautious. As they had ever been. As any true Slytherin would be. “I can’t imagine he was pleased.”

“No,” Lucius agreed, succinctly, “he was not.” Both knew that neither man was speaking of his son.

“You take too many risks, my friend. Anyone else would be dead,” and there was a hint of emotion in Severus’ normally stoic voice. It was a rare occurrence that Lucius had experienced only a handful of times in all the years he had known the man.

“Then I should be exceptionally glad that I am me, and my loyalty is beyond reproach.” Lucius couldn’t feel Severus slithering along the edges of his mind, but he was careful regardless in both word and thought. Severus was much more insidious than the Dark Lord had ever been, the latter of whom often resorted to brute force entry. Lucius could always feel the Dark Lord’s attempts. He had rarely felt Severus’.

“Not quite,” Severus replied, sipping delicately at his wine for the first time. “I alone, among us, understand how important your family is to you, and that Draco’s future has been threatened by the ministry’s recent mistakes, which is why I spoke for you.” Severus refilled Lucius’ glass, watching as he tucked a strand of hair nervously behind his ear. “Whatever you’re up to, be careful. I can’t protect you from yourself.”

He stood and crossed the room as Severus looked on, ostensibly to play with a jar of scales sitting on the desk, but they both knew he really needed a moment to regain his composure following the unexpected information. Lucius was certainly concerned. He hadn’t realized how tenuous his position was and if not for Severus… It was left unsaid, but Lucius knew the warning that hung in the air between them. Whatever happened, Severus could not stand for him again.

He set down the jar, the scales inside tinkling lightly, and ran his fingertips over the enormous stack of parchments in front of him. That was it, the reason it suddenly seemed so cluttered since his last visit. He picked up the one on the top. “This is dreadful. Crabbe? Well, I can’t say I’m surprised.” He rifled through the stack disinterestedly.

“Unfortunately, most of the rest aren’t much better.”

“Merlin’s beard, Severus! Don’t you have any promising students?” He was right. Most were appallingly bad, and not only by Severus’ rather strict standards.

“A few,” he conceded. “Four Ravenclaw, two Slytherin, two Hufflepuff, and a Gryffindor. You
know Mr. Zabini, of course. I believe the only other one you would be familiar with is the Gryffindor, Miss Granger.”

“Yes, I remember.” Lucius allowed some of his old hatred to color his voice for good measure. “You believe a muggle-born could really be that talented?”

“She has the potential but I doubt she will ever truly recognize it.” Severus shook his head ruefully at the thought of such a waste of talent.

Careful to keep his voice neutral, “And what makes you say that.”

“Well, she’s quite well-read, knows the text backwards and forwards, and that is where it ends. She has an insufferable need to always be right, spewing the text verbatim even when asked a simple question. To reach her potential, she would need to be able to go beyond the text and create, to improvise, and I don’t believe she is capable of that. I don't believe she has ever had a single original thought in her head.”

Lucius filed the information away for later and moved on. Hermione Granger was not a subject to be dwelt upon if he wanted to avoid rousing suspicion. He nodded and made a noise in the back of his throat to indicate disdain the way he might have done a year ago.

“Well, this,” he said, gesturing to the overgrown pile of parchments, “doesn’t look like you’re having fun. This looks like you’re punishing students because the ministry’s puppet is breathing down your neck. Don’t try and tell me you enjoy the ministry looking over your shoulder to check your work. It’s an insult to your considerable talent.”

“A temporary annoyance,” but he sounded like he was trying to convince himself.

“You know you still have that standing offer at my company.”

Severus scoffed at him. “Why would an investment company want a potions master on the payroll?”

“Why wouldn’t I? Do you have any idea what I could get away with? How much money you would make me?”

“As if you even need it,” Severus muttered.

Lucius smirked, unable to resist teasing his taciturn friend. “I could be your white knight, Severus. Rescue you. Take you away from all this.”

“I’m perfectly fine right where I am,” he insisted. “The few worthwhile students more than make up for all the dunderheads.” Lucius tilted his head skeptically, raising an eyebrow. “Mostly.”

“Well, the offer as always, stands.” He threw Crabbe’s terribly written assignment back on top of the stack. “I suppose I should be off. The puppet will apparently be joining us for the afternoon session. I’m sure it will be riveting.”

“Shall I expect you later, then?”

“No, I’m afraid I have another appointment.” The small wooden box weighed heavily in his jacket pocket but he resisted the urge to touch it. “I’ll send another bottle over and we’ll celebrate once the puppet is gone.”

“I look forward to the day,” Severus twitched his lip in his version of a smile, “though, I will be
surprised if you manage to avoid going on a rampage this afternoon. No doubt she will try even your legendary patience.”

Severus had been right, of course. He couldn’t understand how the man could tolerate the witch, considering his infamous disposition. If he hadn’t had to maintain a certain level of decorum, he would probably have left ten minutes into the meeting. As it was, he bolted for the door, though he made absolutely certain it didn’t appear as such, the moment the meeting adjourned, and was unsurprised to see that he wasn’t the only one. There was normally a bit of chatting once the head governor had released them but today they all seemed to be rushing off on their own, most likely to avoid being cornered by Fudge’s up-jumped flunky. This worked to his advantage, because it meant he could head to his next destination immediately without the other governors questioning why he was leaving so soon.

He was now strolling casually through the familiar stone corridors. The halls were mostly empty so late in the day, although there still remained far too many students about for his liking. Most kept their gazes averted, giving him a wide berth. The few who didn’t, earned a penetrating stare and cowered against the wall appropriately and his dark mood lifted somewhat. If he hadn’t been a Malfoy, he might even have laughed out loud at the absurdity.

The hallways were, thankfully, empty in the lower section of the castle. Lucius cracked open the door to room thirty-four. It was dark inside, which he took for a good sign as he slipped in and closed the door behind him. He readied the room for her arrival and as light flared around him, he removed his cloak, giving the room a cursory appraisal. It was comforting in its familiarity, the hard, wooden benches a reminder of days long gone. He eschewed those benches in favor of the slightly more comfortable teacher’s chair, and as he sank gracefully into it, he wondered where he might be if circumstances were different. If his father had not chosen to ride the cloak-tails of so many dark wizards, would he be fighting tooth and nail for his family’s future right now?

If Severus hadn’t intervened on his behalf, he might well be dead now. His thumb moved back and forth across the head of his cane in a self-soothing gesture he only engaged in when he was truly agitated. He tried to calm himself before Hermione arrived. A reassuring weight seemed to settle on his shoulder at the thought. When had he begun to think of her so fondly that the mere idea of her presence could seem so reassuring? Well, even Severus was impressed in his own grudging way, so maybe he shouldn’t have been surprised really.

His imagination, unfortunately, ran away from him as the comforting presence on his shoulder turned sensual, moving down his chest. Apparently, he was incapable of thinking about her in a non-sexual way. He stilled, screaming inwardly in the effort to get himself under control. It didn’t work, and his traitorous cock twitched in response to his thoughts. He told himself that it was just the stress he was under as the blood rushed south. Any sane person would get carried away with a fantasy if they had just found out they were nearly murdered. And then to have to sit through that travesty of a governor’s meeting… He told himself that’s all it was.

Lucius shifted in his chair wondering if he had time to release some of that tension before she arrived.
First, I want to give everyone who has commented and left kudos a big thank you! It really makes me happy when other people like this story as much as I do.

This is a long one guys and I've added some new tags for this chapter. I wanted to make sure I got it posted before classes started because updates from here on out will get a little more sporadic. I think this chapter requires a bit more of a detailed author note than I’ve previously written. Way back in the note for chapter 1 (over 45,000 words ago) I mentioned that one of my goals for this story was to write Lucius/Hermione in a way that I hadn’t quite seen before. There have been hints in previous chapters, but this is the one where I’ve started to dig into that. Hermione is finding herself in this story. She is still learning who she is. She is not simply a bratty sub, but due to her inexperience does commit a massive faux pas in this chapter when it comes to BDSM etiquette. Just a word of warning in case that’s triggering for anyone. This is some of my favorite smut in this story and I hope you all like it too. Now, without further adieu… I give you SMUT!

The classroom was dark when Hermione slipped inside at 4:07 in the afternoon. She set her bag down on one of the benches, the contents clinking together hollowly, and then settled in to wait near the door at the back of the room. It was still early, but she had finished her homework for the day in anticipation of their meeting and had nothing else with which to occupy her mind, so she chose instead to wait.

Lucius entered fifteen minutes later. He slipped into the room so quietly that if not for the click of the door latch and the creak of its hinges, Hermione wasn't sure she would have noticed his arrival. He walked in as though he were meant to be there, his heavy cloak swirling about his legs. As soon as the door swung closed, he drew his wand and with several quick, efficient flicks, fired off two spells. The torches and candles flared to life an instant before the muffling spell settled over the room. Before both spells were completed, his wand was already returning to its housing. It settled inside the cane with an audible click as the muffling spell descended fully over the already quiet room.

Ever since they had met in Flourish and Blotts all those years ago, Hermione could only recall seeing him use his wand on the goblet when he had first taken her. Perhaps that was what he had meant when he had said that he appreciated magic: that he viewed it as something to respect rather than flaunt. She could understand that.

No matter how rarely he used it, his wand work was perhaps even more precise than Professor McGonagall’s. There was a certain flair to hers while his had a more minimalistic, economical quality to it. It was impressive. There was one spell he hadn’t yet performed, expecting her to still be on her way. Hermione drew her own wand, pointed it at the door, and performed a locking spell on the mechanism.

She turned back, watching as he shrugged out of his cloak and tossed it across a desk. He strode quickly, with sure steps towards the front of the classroom, and sat at the teacher’s desk to wait.
He propped his elbow on the arm of the chair and rested his chin in his hand. Hermione stood up from where she was seated, moving closer to him. She had expected him to sit at the head of the classroom. The teacher’s chair was by far the most comfortable.

When he had contacted her, she had expected it to be a short business meeting, a chance for them to get caught up and reassess, given the recent setbacks. She had changed her mind when she had entered the great hall for lunch and had seen him sitting with the other governors at the head table. He had been chatting intently with several others and hadn’t noticed her. For her part, she had tried not to openly stare at him, but had found herself distracted every time he smiled or laughed at something one of the other governors said.

After their mediocre date, Cormac had tried snogging her in a hallway after one of the D.A. meetings, and Hermione had let him, until he started getting handsy. It wasn't that she had really wanted to make out with Cormac, but Lucius had been the only man she had ever kissed. She had nothing with which to compare.

It hadn't taken long for her to conclude that there was no comparison. Pressed against Cormac, with his tongue in her mouth, she had felt nothing, except perhaps a queasiness in her stomach. On the other hand, she had only to look at Lucius across a crowded room, and want coiled low in her belly.

She had decided as the governing board had filed out of the great hall, that the meeting could wait until after she had reacquainted herself with Lucius and the parts of him that made her shudder. Besides, there was something she had been wondering about when it came to her amulet. She hadn’t attempted to test it yet, but since Lucius knew all about it, he was the perfect subject to try it out on. If it didn’t work the way she hoped, she would know it immediately, and get what she wanted that much sooner. It was a win-win situation for her really.

Hermione stopped directly in front of him and took a moment to observed him without him knowing she was there. His eyes were closed, his breathing even, but she knew he wasn’t asleep because his thumb was idly caressing the head of his cane, just above the snake’s left eye. It was such a tiny, human gesture, one she doubted she was meant to see. She gingerly placed a hand on his shoulder, and there was no change in his posture, but his thumb paused for a moment before his fingers readjusted their grip on his cane.

At some point, he had ceased being nothing more to her than Draco's father, or a pure-blooded bigot, or even just a Death Eater. Hermione wasn’t sure when all these terms, these definitions, had stopped defining him for her, but the name Lucius Malfoy didn't mean the same thing to her it once did. She allowed her hand to wander down over his chest, the warmth of his body seeping through the layers of his clothing. Her hand crept lower, skimming across the top of a scar kept hidden from the world, and Lucius stilled completely.

He was not a one-dimensional caricature as she had once thought. He was just a man, flesh and blood beneath her hand, and full of all the insecurities that brought with it. Hermione glanced down at the unmistakable proof of his maleness, when he shifted in his chair. She wondered what he was thinking. She knew what she was thinking, and it wasn't just about his cock. That was certainly on her mind, but that wasn't the whole of it. She was quite fond of several of his other attributes too.

Stepping back, Hermione glanced around briefly, considering what she wanted. She walked back around the desk so that it was between them and grasped her amulet, taking several deep breaths and uttered the release word. She put a somewhat, breathless quality into her voice to make it sound as though she had just come running into the room and said, “I’m terribly sorry I’m late, Professor Malfoy!”

His eyes snapped open, landing on her before dropping down towards his crotch with a guilty look
as he shifted in discomfort, and then back to her. The slightly confused look on his face was so comical, Hermione had to fight to keep the grin off hers. It was several moments before his brain caught up to her words and the sudden fact that he was not alone. Hermione waited it out, an earnest, innocent look plastered across her features.

“Professor?” he echoed hollowly. Well, it seemed he hadn’t completely caught up yet.

“Yes, professor. I do hope I haven’t come on the wrong day…for my detention.” His eyebrows shot up. His gaze taking in her appearance: her school uniform, the suitably innocent and yet chastised look in her eyes. Lucius’ tongue peeked out to wet his lips, knuckles turning white where they gripped his cane. *There it is*, Hermione thought.

“Do you have any idea what game you’re playing at?” His voice was low, a warning, and Hermione shivered at the edge it took on. She wanted him to use that voice on her, to speak filth in her ear, and bend her to his will.

But why wouldn’t he want to? Was it because he was a board member? Because they were at Hogwarts? That shouldn’t have mattered. Their meeting was meant to be secret. It shouldn't have been any different than their time together at the manor.

Hermione broke character for just a moment so that he would know she was serious about her request. “Who says I’m playing? I read up on it.”

“You read up on- Really?” he replied, an incredulous look on his face. “And where exactly did you read up on teacher-student roleplay?”

“Well, one of my roommates, she has a collection of- of magazines, and I read an article. A few articles actually...” Hermione tugged nervously on the hem of her skirt as she tried to explain.

Lucius lowered his head momentarily, eyes drifting closed, blocking out the sight as he attempted to exert control over himself.

“I didn’t come here to play.” He opened his eyes and they bore straight into her. “I came here for business.” She knew he was right. They had a lot to discuss.

Still... Hermione had her stubborn mind made up. She allowed what she hoped was a seductive, teasing edge to color her words. “Are you so proper that you’ve never had dessert before dinner?”

Lucius rolled his eyes and murmured snarkily, “You should read up on seduction next time,” but the way those grey eyes traveled down her body to where her hands still twisted in her skirt, told her that despite her clumsy attempt, he was interested.

His shakily exhaled breath and lopsided grin told her that he was entirely willing to put business on hold and indulge her.

His words confirmed it.

“Remind me how you earned yourself detention this time, Miss Granger.”

*This time*, she thought to herself, permitting a small victorious smile before slipping back into her role. He was going play along, but apparently wanted her to set the parameters of their game. It was only fitting, she reasoned, since it had been her idea to begin with.

She could handle it. She just had to come up with a reason she might have gotten detention.
“Well, Professor Malfoy,” Hermione liked the way his eyes darkened when she said it, “this morning in potions, I argued with you about the morally acceptable uses for Polyjuice. You claimed I was being cheeky and here we are.” That seemed reasonable. She ducked her head innocently and waited for his response.

“Claimed? An interesting word choice.” She glanced up from the surface of the desk, and noted that he was fully invested, though he had schooled his features and his expression was now unreadable.

“I maintain that it was merely a spirited discussion,” she replied slowly, wondering what he would make of that.

Lucius drummed his fingers on the arm of his chair, rolling his cane loosely between the fingers of the opposite hand, and stared her down. Hermione fidgeted under his intense scrutiny.

“Spirited discussion is all well and good, Miss Granger. It enlivens the learning environment. It is disrespect which I will not tolerate in my class. I can’t be expected to maintain order if my students disrespect me in front of their peers.” He waited for her reply.

Hermione nodded quickly in response. “You’re right, Professor. I’m sorry. It won’t happen again.”

“Since this is your third detention this week, I somehow doubt the veracity of that statement.” He stood abruptly, startling her, though she attempted not to let the shock show on her face. The slight, infuriating tilt of his lip informed her that she had failed miserably in that endeavour.

He walked around the desk slowly, not looking at her, and as he reached her shoulder he inclined his head slightly to finally acknowledge her. “You scrubbed out cauldrons last time?”

Her eyes flicked to his briefly, “Yes, Professor.”

He nodded, continuing to stalk his way around her. As he disappeared from view, she remained facing forward, listening to him move behind her. She strained her ears, and caught the rustle of cloth, imagining all kinds of naughty things and wondered what he was really doing.

“Clearly a form of punishment that doesn’t work for you.” She felt him move her hair to the side, exposing her neck, and struggled to remain still.

“But then I’ve always found more physical forms of punishment to be more effective,” he whispered against the shell of her ear, and as he continued walking, he allowed his fingertips to trail down the column of her exposed neck, and across the top of her shoulder before finally slipping off as he came back into view on the opposite side.

Hermione could feel her knickers grow damp at his heated words and his fleeting touch. He had removed his suit-jacket and unfastened his waistcoat while out of sight and he looked absolutely delicious. It was a true struggle to remain facing forward, but she couldn't help but observe him surreptitiously.

He stood so close to her she could breath in the scent of his familiar cologne, and nearly moaned aloud at the way it wrapped around her, invading her senses. Out of the corner of her vision she could see his head turning this way and that as he studied her. He stepped back in front of her, and the head of his cane came to rest underneath her chin, forcing her head up to look at him. He seemed to be thinking as he lightly bit into his lower lip. Hermione swallowed and licked her own in response.

Lucius had planned to remain professional, to make good use of the limited time they had. It
seemed as though Hermione had made other plans, and while he wasn’t necessarily opposed to the suggestion, he knew they didn’t truly have the time to engage in what she wanted, or to play the way he liked to play. Lucius preferred not to rush his games. He liked to savor. The vivid memory of her on her knees, staring up at him with pleading eyes, her lips wrapped around his cock, caused his stomach to tighten, and the organ in question to twitch in anticipation. Oh, how he wanted that again.

They could play, he decided, maybe not the way he wanted to, not today anyway, but there were a number of different ways he could take this that would be satisfying enough. One scenario in particular would work quite well with what she had set up for him already. Maybe he couldn’t take his time, and tease out every little response, though there would definitely be teasing, but he could give her a taste of what she was asking for.

Erring on the side of caution, Lucius decided to limit their game to areas they had already explored. He could work with that in the confines of her scenario, and he could always pull it back if he needed to. If she wanted more than that, she would just have to play with him again. Lucius smiled. He wouldn’t mind that at all.

His sudden, unexpected smirk unnerved her a little, and aroused her more than she cared to admit. He lowered his cane and reached up to brush his thumb across her lips, dragging the lower one downward so that they parted slightly. His gaze remained firmly fixated on her mouth, but he said nothing. He stared for so long that Hermione found herself wishing he would do something. Anything.

“Professor? What are you-”

It was apparently what he had been waiting for.

“I didn’t tell you to speak.” His voice was clipped. A low growl, that edge of warning creeping back in. Another shiver ran through her, her pulse and breathing quickening pace.

His cane popped back up into view, startling her, his hand grasping it near the middle.

“Perhaps,” he drawled, placing the head of his cane lightly on her shoulder, “rather than a punishment, you’re the type that might respond better to a lesson.”

Brushing his thumb over her bottom lip one last time, he withdrew his hand and took a half step back. “Yes, I think I should teach you acceptable uses for that smart mouth of yours. Perhaps you'll learn not to go shooting it off in class.”

Hermione gasped, that delicious ache settling in the pit of her stomach, and she slowly dropped to her knees under the inexorable pressure of the silver snake digging into the flesh of her shoulder.

“Now stay,” he ordered once she was settled before him.

Hermione waited, hands resting lightly on the tops of her thighs, so unbelievably turned on as she stared up at him.

He threw his cane, and it clattered onto the desk behind her.

“Take off your robe, cardigan, and shoes,” he ordered. “Leave the rest of your uniform on.”

She quickly did as he commanded, shrugging out of the robe, and skimming her jumper off over her head, throwing the garments out of the way. When she looked at him again, his waistcoat was
gone, and he was palming himself through the fabric of his trousers, watching her hungrily. She stared at the outline of his erection beneath his fingers, licking her lips in anticipation.

He chuckled darkly, reaching down to grasp her tie, and used it to pull her forward, until her face pressed up against his crotch. Even though she desperately wanted his hands on her, his earlier fleeting touches not nearly enough, she merely nuzzled against him with a sigh, waiting for him to continue. She had put him in charge with this request, after all.

Seemingly in no rush, he unbuttoned his shirt partway, holding her against him the entire time. “You may begin.”

Hermione reached for his belt.

“No,” he warned sharply, and she stopped abruptly, concerned by his tone. “Put your hands behind your back. This particular lesson is for your mouth alone.”

She was confused for a second, unsure of how to proceed if she couldn't use her hands, but did as he bid her, and tentatively pressed the tip of her tongue against him through the fabric, licking along the length experimentally.

Maybe he was going to help her out?

It didn’t take her long to determine that was not the case.

Moving upward, she worked at his belt buckle with teeth and tongue and lips. The clasp was difficult to free and she had to really work at it, growling in frustration until it finally gave way. She had a slightly easier time with the buttons of his fly and pulled them free one by one.

Taking first one side of his now unbuttoned trousers in her teeth and then the other, Hermione tugged, attempting to widen the opening. She pressed her nose into the patch of hair her efforts revealed, breathing in Lucius’ masculine scent. Her tongue snaked out, licking at the exposed base of his shaft. He gripped the back of her head, forcing her closer against him and she opened her mouth wider, suckling at a raised vein, her tongue laving enthusiastically.

He groaned, and she returned to urgently tugging again at his trousers, trying to free him. Even through her frantic tugging, the head was still trapped, and he didn’t seem inclined to help her. She glared up in frustration and he was just staring at her, smirking at her efforts. His hand was in his shirt and she knew those fingers were tweaking that nipple harshly. Her own were painfully hard.

With a snarl, Hermione gave one last violent tug. Finally, through her efforts, he sprang free, cockhead bouncing lightly against her cheek, and leaving a wet trail in its wake.

Before she could close her lips around him, he gripped the shaft, pulling his cock away from her questing mouth, and held it flat against his stomach. She felt his fingers twisting in the hair at the back of her head as he guided her lower. She let her tongue dance back and forth over one of his testicles, delighting in the breathy little moan he released, and sucked it into her mouth. Her actions earned a grunt and a slight roll of his pelvis against her face, so she repeated her actions on the other one, eager to make him do it again.

Hermione shifted on her knees, spreading them apart a bit, trying to get comfortable on the stone floor. Her hips rocked slightly, seeking friction of some kind to soothe that ache deep within. Before she realized exactly what she was doing, her hands were at the hem of her skirt, pulling it higher. She stilled her hands before she had managed to slide them beneath the fabric, recalling his earlier warning, and paused in the movements of her mouth.
When she looked up at him, she knew there was a pleading quality to her gaze as she silently begged him for relief. Hermione whimpered in frustration when he shook his head slightly, but resumed her ministrations, switching her attention between both of his bollocks for a while. She allowed her hands to fall to her sides, one hand supporting herself on the floor as she concentrated on her task, and at length drew them both into her mouth.

It wasn’t too much longer after that, that he pushed her away, panting, and held her at arms-length. Lucius squeezed his fingers tightly around the base before he began stroking himself slowly, his breathing returning to normal as he held her in place. As his respiration rate calmed, hers seemed to increase under the intensity of his stare.

He smiled slowly. “Open your mouth.”

_Fucking finally_, she thought. Her eyes fluttered closed as her lips parted. His hand at the back of her neck pulled her forward, squeezing affectionately as her lips wrapped around him. She sighed at the feel of him, clutching at the back of his knee. He didn’t reprimand her for it, so she left her hand where it was. If he wanted her to move it he could make her. She swirled her tongue around the head, dipping into the slit, and sucking hungrily as she bobbed up and down on him.

His breathing began to speed up once more, and he abandoned his passivity to move and began thrusting, occasionally bumping up against her throat. She gagged the first few times it happened but quickly regained control of her reflexes when he pulled back, grateful that he was careful not to go too deep. The fingers of both hands threaded through her hair, holding her still as he continued, and she could tell that he was getting close. He seemed to grow more vocal whenever he was nearing his climax and an impressive string of expletives was tumbling from his lips as the twitch of his cock in her mouth grew more pronounced.

Hermione glanced up at him. His eyes were impossibly dark with lust as he looked down at her, and she resolved to finish him off quickly so that he could return the favor. She was so aroused her knickers were soaked through, and she wouldn’t have been surprised to find a puddle on the floor beneath her if she happened to look. Not taking her eyes off his face, Hermione sucked harder and moaned around the hard flesh in her mouth and that seemed to do it. Lucius inhaled sharply, and grew impossibly still save for the rapid rise and fall of his chest, every exhale a husky moan as his cock spasmed, flooding her mouth. She swallowed greedily, moaning at the hot splash of it on her tongue, marveling at how she had missed the taste of him. She sucked on him, her tongue digging into the ridge behind the head when he finished until he had become too sensitive and pushed her away once again.

Hermione studied him from her position on the floor, relishing the glassy, satisfied, unfocused look in his eyes. He shook his head, possibly to clear it and fixed his gaze on her, carding his fingers through her messy hair. His voice was a bit shaky when he spoke. “It would seem that you didn’t actually need a lesson.”

Hermione grinned, a fresh wave of arousal washing through her. “No, Professor.”

“Then I can only assume, Miss Granger, that you had an ulterior motive for ensuring that you received detention.”

“That’s correct, Professor.” Hermione bit her lip before shyly lowering her gaze to the floor, and then said quietly, “I wanted to be alone with you.”

He pulled her to her feet, lifting her chin to meet his gaze, and wiping the corner of her mouth with his thumb. “For what reason, Miss Granger?”
She ducked her head and grinned coyly, playing with the opening of his shirt. “I enjoyed sucking your cock, Professor Malfoy.”

Lucius grasped her wrist tightly to halt her movements. “Did I ask if you enjoyed it? Answer my question.”

Her eyes met his again. “I’ve been watching you all year, Professor, looking at me when you think I don’t notice. I thought, if I could get you alone, you might finally decide to fuck me.” His brow lifted skyward at the boldness of her statement. Hermione grinned. She was enjoying the game immensely, it was wickedly naughty, but she had also wanted him inside her ever since he had entered the room. As far as she was concerned, it was time to move things along. She glanced down at his flaccid length, a disappointed expression on her face. “Unfortunately, that doesn’t seem likely now, so I guess you’ll just have to use your mouth.”

His grip on her wrist tightened, and he grasped her by the jaw, surprising her, fingers digging in, and snarled dangerously, “I thought you learned your lesson about the cheek.”

He held her for a second, a wicked grin sliding into place, before crushing his mouth to hers, his tongue plunging inside. She whimpered under his assault, thrilling at the thought that he could taste himself on her. He broke the kiss abruptly, forcing her backwards. She bumped into the massive teacher’s desk with a gasp, ink bottles and instruments rattling at the contact. Lucius trapped her there with his body. He reached behind her, sweeping everything off onto the floor, with a clatter of broken glass.

“Lie down and raise your hips,” he demanded, shoving her backwards over the scarred wooden surface, turning her, moving with her until her back was to the classroom and he stood between her knees. She felt dizzy, and she didn’t think it was all from his manhandling.

Hermione’s hands shot beneath her without question as she obeyed. Lucius reached beneath the hem of her skirt, hooking his fingers into the waistband of her knickers, and tugged them down roughly. The scrap of lace caught for a second on her ankle, releasing with a snap against his hand. Hermione spread her legs eagerly for him as he caressed a hand up her thigh. That hand stopped before it found its way beneath her skirt once more, his fingers teasing circles on her inner thigh, so close to where she wanted him and yet too far away.

“Have you already taken a potion?” She nodded eagerly at his query, surprised and delighted that he was ready to go again so soon. Based on what she had read, she had been expecting a talented tongue instead.

He stepped back, admiring the view, and lounged in the forgotten chair making no move toward her. Hermione sat up, staring at him in disbelief. “I thought you were going to fuck me.”

His sinful smirk was infuriating. “And I may, but as you pointed out,” he answered with a pointed glance downward, “that’s not currently an option.” His grin grew wider at her groan of frustration. “If you find yourself unable wait for me,” he continued, “you should certainly proceed.”

Hermione looked at him in shock. Did he expect her to... ?

“Yes, Miss Granger. I want you to pleasure yourself for me.”

“But I-” she started before he cut her off.

“Oh, come now. You were practically begging for the privilege earlier.” She wanted to tell him that earlier he hadn’t been staring at her and she had at least had something to distract herself with.
"You're right, you know. I have been watching you. What did you imagine I was thinking all those times you caught me looking?" He indicated the desk beneath her. "That piece of furniture you're draped over factored quite heavily in those fantasies, in more ways than one." He canted his head to the side, a single eyebrow raised, staring brazenly between her legs. "You have no idea. Be a good girl for me and I just might show you." The hunger in his gaze was unmistakable.

She took a deep unsteady breath and asked haltingly, "Should I take my uniform off?"

"No, leave it on." He shifted in the chair. "Just pull up your skirt so I can enjoy the show."

Hermione lay back, pulling at the fabric, blushing at the feel of being so exposed to his gaze, and yet, still hopelessly aroused. It couldn’t that bad, she reasoned. It wasn’t like she hadn’t touched herself before, she had just never had an audience. She started hesitantly, rubbing first her thumb and then her fingers over her mound before those fingers traveled lower, trying to forget that he was watching her, imagining instead that it was him touching her just the way she liked. In her mind, her hand became his hand. His long fingers would tease apart her labia and delve into the damp heat they found there, and he would groan out loud when he realized that she wasn’t just damp, that she was slick and ready for him. She swallowed thickly, growing surer in her movements. He would work one finger inside her slowly, and find her so wet that he would quickly add a second, twisting and thrusting them inside. Her breath began coming in short, rapid pants as her fingers mimicked the ones in her fantasy. She brought her other hand up off the desk, fingering her clit and gazed down the length of her body at Lucius.

Her stomach flipped, and she felt herself clench around the fingers inside her. He was leaning back languidly, his shirt fully undone now, cock standing proudly once more though he wasn’t touching himself. He held the lace knickers he had ripped off her to his nose, inhaling deeply, and looking positively sinful. Her hips bucked sharply against her hand at the sight, her fingers pressing harder on her clit. She arched her back, digging a heel into the top of the desk as her orgasm coursed through her body. Her low groan of ecstasy sounded primal to her own ears, and she fell back onto the wooden surface, allowing her arms to flop bonelessly onto the desk, breathing hard as her body tingled with the aftermath of her pleasure.

She was so caught up in the feeling of pure bliss that she didn’t even hear him move. He placed one hand on top of her thigh, as the other gripped the back of her knee, pulling her toward the edge of the massive desk. Before she had fully recovered, he entered her in one smooth stroke. She cried out at the intrusion, but lifted her hips eagerly to meet his. Lucius moved his hand from her thigh, flattening his palm on the desk. He switched his grip on her knee, pushing her leg outward, opening her up for him, and pinned her in place beneath him, seating himself fully within her.

"Move already," she hissed when he remained still. Lucius leaned forward, covering her mouth with his own in a frustratingly gentle kiss, as he sucked lazily on her tongue. His hips ground against hers, until he finally pulled a wretched whimper from her. Satisfied with his reminder of just who was in control, Lucius pushed himself back up, and at long last, gave her what she had been waiting for.

He drove into her repeatedly, grunting harshly with each thrust. Hermione’s head thudded back onto the surface and she took each measured stroke with a harsh grunt of her own. She gazed at him perched above her, his shirt falling open to bare his strong, beautiful chest to her gaze. Hermione reached up, placing her hand on his chest, smoothing the cloth to the side. She pinched his left nipple, hard, and earned a particularly brutal thrust for doing so. A wicked thought popped into her head and she pushed herself awkwardly up onto an elbow, a somewhat challenging feat in the position he held her in, drawing the bud into her mouth. He moaned when she did it. She laved the peak with the flat of her tongue, suckling for a moment before pulling back to look at him and
favored him with a feral, mischievous grin. She dove back in, sinking her teeth into the flesh just beside the rosy skin encircling his erect nipple, the faintest hint of copper blossoming on her tongue.

The sound that tore its way from his throat was halfway between a roar and a scream. Hermione drew back to survey her handiwork, but before she could get a good look, she felt his absence inside her. Lucius yanked her off the desk, looking equally as dangerous as he had so long ago in his dungeon when he dragged her to her knees. She felt like a rag-doll in his arms as he spun her around quickly.

Hermione reached out blindly, finding purchase on the desk in front of her to stop herself from falling. Lucius kicked her feet apart and forced her face-down across the desk. She gripped the edges tightly, pushing her arse back against him, encouragingly, wanting, needing his cock back inside her. He flipped her skirt up out of his way, thrusting two fingers inside her instead, one hand fisted in the hair at the nape of her neck. Hermione cried out as he held her down and twisted his hand, thrusting harshly. She was panting wantonly, mouth opened in a small smile, enjoying the sensation of her orgasm building again.

He pulled on her hair, forcing her back to arch sharply, and turned her face to the side so that she could see him over her shoulder. She groaned in frustration once again when his talented fingers left her. When he brought them up into her line of sight, they were glistening, and he rubbed her slick between his fingers and thumb. “So, you think you want it rough?” He growled between clenched teeth, breathing raggedly.

“I know I do,” she answered, breathing just as harshly, and struggling futilely to escape his grasp.

He grabbed her face, smearing their combined secretions across her lips with his thumb and sealed his mouth to hers, tongue forcing its way inside. His dominant display was wonderfully filthy and Hermione moaned into his mouth as her tongue tangled with his. His heart pounded fast. She could feel it where he pressed against her back, but her own heart was jackhammering just as quickly.

He broke off the rough kiss, gasping, and bit at her bottom lip. The look in his eyes was predatory as he said, “I truly do hope that’s the case.”

He released her jaw, his hand moving down to grasp his cock as he lined himself up at the entrance to her slick passage, allowing just the head to sink inside. His hand moved again to rest at the small of her back, and Hermione adjusted her grip on the desk, bracing herself. When he curled his fingers into the fabric of her shirt, gathering it, and hauled her back against him, the force with which he thrust forward took her by surprise. She had thought she was ready for it, that she knew what was coming. Despite her preparation, Hermione screamed, a choked sob, forcing its way through clenched teeth, and she didn’t know if she was screaming from the abruptness and force of his intrusion or because it was exactly what she needed.

Lucius pressed up against the length of her back, crushing her beneath him, and pulled out so that only the head remained once more. He nuzzled her neck, breathing in deeply, nipping roughly at her throat and earlobe. “You couldn’t have worn it proudly,” he murmured in her ear, “but tell me, did you show anyone?” Hermione knew what he was talking about. She would have, even if he had not been licking and nipping at the area near where his mark had resided. “My roommates.” Her voice was a breathy whisper ending in a strangled sob as her answer earned a single violent thrust of his hips.

“And were you thinking of me with your fingers buried in your sweet cunt?” The insufferable smirk was evident in his voice. Hermione squirmed beneath him, arousal coursing through her at his crude language, and she opened her mouth to speak. “Oh, and just so you know, I’m not asking
about your earlier performance…” Her stomach clenched. *How does he know that?*

“Yes, I thought of you,” she whispered breathily. He withdrew and entered her again, only this time it was agonizing in its exquisite slowness and she couldn’t even push back against him, trapped in place by his hands and body. Hermione’s eyes rolled back, and every single nerve ending in her body seemed to fire in a rolling wave that didn’t stop until he was pressed flush against her, and she released the breath she hadn’t realized she had been holding.

“And why did you bite me?” His voice somehow grew dangerous again without losing its playful tone. His teeth were on her neck again, and Hermione thought that this time he would mark her so that she couldn’t easily hide it without a glamour. She waited anxiously but the bite never came. “Do you even know? Was it to mark me as your own or did you just want me to lose control?” Hermione didn’t answer, not truly certain of her motivations. In that moment it had crossed her mind it had just seemed like the thing to do.

“Now, I’m not opposed to the former,” he continued when she didn’t respond, “but this little game you started isn’t the right context for that. As for the latter, I’ll have you know,” his voice was near hypnotic at this point, “that I am in complete control.” He kissed the juncture of her shoulder and neck tenderly. “I want you to know that.” Her inner muscles tensed at his words.

He removed his weight from her back and then he was moving again. His fist in her hair and his hand tangled in her shirt controlled her every movement. Both his hands worked together to pull her onto his cock as his hips drove forward, his pace still infuriatingly languid. “I want you to know, that I am making the choice,” he whispered, “to give you the brutal fucking you seem to so desperately crave, provided that you truly do crave it.”

Hermione realized in that moment just how far they had deviated from the parameters she had originally set up. She had been far too focused on all the things he was making her feel, reduced to a needy, mewling creature writhing beneath him. He needed confirmation from her that she knew and wanted what she had practically demanded from him, what he was offering. “I do want it, Lucius. Please, I need it,” she begged.

He picked up the pace at her words, the first, promised, brutal thrust coming moments after she finished speaking, and she felt like she was going to break apart under the viciousness of his onslaught. The desk became a lifeline and it was all she could do to cling to it as he crashed against her like a raging storm. She could feel herself start to tighten around him and knew she was getting close.

Hermione released her grip on the edge of the desk and reached down between her legs to find her clit, and began rubbing at it in time with his vicious thrusts. Liquid fire pooled in her belly as her muscles clamped down around him, and Hermione came screaming his name. His cock pulsed inside her, as he came with her, roaring his release.
A Series of Unexpected Revelations

Chapter Notes

It's a new chapter! My birthday gift to all of you! And this one was super hard to write and edit. TFW when you know from day zero that Lucius is a switch and yet when you go to write the reveal you still don't quite know how to do it. Enjoy!

Lucius loosened his grip on her, and practically collapsed onto Hermione's back, groaning as he tried to catch his breath. He adjusted slightly so that his arm could take most of his weight and they lay across the top of the desk breathing hard for a handful of long minutes, recovering together.

His cheek pressed into her shoulder blade, and the heartbeat that had hammered so recently against her back began to slow.

Hermione shifted under his weight and snaked a hand behind her to caress his side.

“I wouldn’t mind doing that again,” she said with a dreamy sigh.

He chuckled and ran his finger tips down her spine, gripping her waist, and pressed his lips to the back of her neck. “Mmm, I really hope you don’t mean right now.”

Hermione only yawned in response, smiling.

“If we are going to do this again,” he murmured into the thick mane of her hair, “I'm definitely going to have to teach you about the proper way of doing things.”

Lucius sighed, pushing up off her. He withdrew, rather gently, Hermione noted, and stepped back. The metallic clink of his buckle as he tucked himself back in and did up his trousers, sounded loud and seemed to have a finality to it in the quiet that surrounded them.

Hermione stood up, her legs immediately giving out, and Lucius was there, his hands on her waist to catch her as her knees buckled beneath her.

“You might want to take a minute,” he suggested as he guided her to sit in the nearby chair. Hermione sank into it gratefully, wincing as she made contact with the seat. Lucius crouched down next to her, the concern in his eyes as he searched her face, palpable.

She glanced down at his chest. His shirt still hung open, several tiny, red dots marring the crisp fabric, and he followed the direction of her gaze.

His voice was quiet, non-accusatory, but curious. “So, why did you do it?”

“You liked it,” she replied quietly, smoothing her skirt and pressing her legs together as she felt the wet trickle begin to pool between her thighs. “You loved it as much as I did.” Hermione was sure he had, because he had never sounded like that before when he came.

His eyes flicked down to the shadow at the hem of her skirt where her fingers smoothed over the fabric, and then met hers once again. “I did, but that’s not the point. You changed the game halfway through without warning. It was your idea to begin with, so why?”
She shook her head and shrugged lightly. “I don’t know. It just felt right.”

Lucius sighed. “If you think we aren't going to discuss this, Hermione, you're wrong.” He tugged aside his shirt collar, inspecting the damage from her sudden, unexpected attack. The bite was vibrant, an angry throbbing pulse, but save for where the edge of a tooth, or two, had torn into him, it was intact. He had already stopped bleeding. “You seemed to be enjoying yourself. Was I mistaken? Did I do something wrong?”

“No,” Hermione replied quickly, “No, I just wanted…” She trailed off, searching for the right words to explain.

Lucius urged her gently to continue. “You bit me for a reason. I think you know why.”

Hermione worried at her lower lip, but wouldn't look at him. How could she explain? How could he possibly understand when she barely did herself?

“You can tell me, you know,” he whispered. “Maybe you feel like you can't. Trust me, you can. If it helps, I doubt anything you say will shock me.” The tone in his voice sounded like he was searching for something, an answer to a question he had yet to ask, and though she wondered what that might be, his words did put her a little more at ease.

Hermione closed her eyes and inhaled deeply, and felt his hand cover hers on the arm of the chair, his thumb caressing the back of her hand encouragingly. And slowly, her hesitant words began spilling from her lips. “You were teasing me- had been teasing me, and then you were fucking me.” She expected some kind of comment, but he remained silent as he listened intently. “You just looked so damn smug, like you'd won something, that I-”

She took a shaky breath, feeling her heart start to pound. “I don’t… I mean, it wasn't even a thought really. In that moment, I just needed to tear into you. I wanted to mark you, so that you would know…”

“Wanted me to know what?” he urged as she fell silent once more.

“That you didn’t own me. That I wouldn't just give in to you. I wanted you to earn it, if you could.”

He was quiet as he studied her, clearly deep in thought, and Hermione had no idea what he would say.

“I hadn't expected that from you. Though, I suppose, given your nature, it shouldn’t truly surprise me.”

Lucius laughed lightly at the glare she leveled at him. “I only mean that you've always been a fighter. Or don't you recall a certain, cheeky young witch in a bookshop? I should have seen it in you.”

“Which makes me wonder…” he added almost as an afterthought.

Hermione's heart started beating fast again, concerned with where his thoughts might be taking him. “You admitted that I was on your mind, but what exactly do you think about with your hands between your legs?”

Her face flushed red.

A slow smile crept across his own. “So when I hold you down, and take what I want, do you fight me every step of the way? Do you sometimes win? What happens when you do?”
His gaze dropped low again with interest, and Hermione followed the direction of that gaze, mortified by the way she unconsciously squirmed in her seat, pressing her thighs together. It took a concentrated effort on her part to stop. “I need my knickers back. What did you do with them?” she asked, attempting to change the subject.

He let go of her hand, and placed his on the armrest to steady himself as he pulled them from his pocket, bringing them beneath his nose once again. “They’re so pretty, I’m inclined to keep them.” Hermione didn’t think he was referring entirely to the lacy fabric if the look in his eyes was any indication of the direction of his thoughts.

She stared back at him, intentionally missing the not-so-hidden meaning of his statement as he continued breathing in the scent of her on them. “They’re transfigured.”

She was pleased when his eyebrows shot up in surprise. The implications of that revelation were clearly not lost on him, but she considered it a small price to pay for his reaction. “I don’t actually own any lace.”

Lucius’ smile widened, the knowledge that she had wanted him enough to transfigure her clothing before ever arriving for their meeting was naturally a massive stroke to his ego.

“That’s a shame,” he said, lowering them at last, and continued, undeterred by her attempt to steer the conversation.

“So, you like being held down, but there’s something more you haven’t told me. Something you want me to do to you?” He paused for a beat in thought before his eyes narrowed a fraction. “No, it’s almost certainly something you want to do to me.”

“It was just a fantasy,” she replied somewhat defensively, her profuse blush returning; just a passing fancy, something she had thought about late at night with her hand between her legs. How in Merlin’s name was the man so good at guessing?

“It doesn’t necessarily have to stay that way.” His eyes glinted with amusement at her look of surprise. “You may recall, that I’ve rather enjoyed taking orders from you before. There’s no telling what I’m willing to do, but you’re unlikely to find out, to get what you want, if you don’t tell me what it is.”

Hermione took an unsteady breath, unable to stop herself from running her hand up and over his arm and shoulder, as she considered it. She touched his neck, toying with small strands of his silken hair, and made her decision, knowing that he wouldn’t laugh at her for it. “When you force me to submit, there’s something about it that’s just raw and passionate. I think I got a taste for it that first time when you- in your dungeon. And after I bit you, you were so rough and it was just so right. I don’t think I’ve ever come so hard.”

“But?” he prodded.

“But sometimes I think about,” her voice dropped to a tremulous whisper, “well, you’re the one on your knees.”

Lucius changed positions, like a big cat uncoiling himself, and slid to his knees to kneel at her feet. “Like this?” he asked, and there was not a trace of mockery in his voice. If anything, there was a low thrum of lust present, not only in his voice, but in the stormy eyes locked on hers.

She nodded slightly, biting her lower lip. “But, not only like that.”

“Hm, I see.” And given his seemingly uncanny ability to read her like a book, Hermione had little
doubt he could imagine the form her fantasy took on. Lucius brought his hand up, skimming up her calf, and caressing the back of her knee lightly. “And does this fantasy version of me accommodate your every whim?”

She swallowed the lump in her throat. “No. He's not really cooperative, or he isn’t in the beginning anyway.”

A small groan escaped him, but his fingers on the back of her leg never lost their rhythm. “Of course, he isn't. I think I begin to see the picture. So, when he stops fighting, is he facing away from you?” The question only further cemented her certainty that Lucius knew. He knew, suspected at least, and had yet to turn her away.

“Sometimes.”

“And the rest of the time?”

“Like you are now,” she replied, clearing her throat slightly.

Lucius said no more as he slipped her knickers over her feet, sliding his hands up her calves as he drew the scrap of fabric up her legs. When he reached her knees, he unhooked his thumbs and her knickers remained behind while his hands continued upwards. He pushed her skirt higher, gripping her thighs and pulling them as far apart as they would go, and her breath hitched in her throat. Lucius glanced up at the sound, and then leaned forward and licked a broad stripe up the inside of her thigh with the flat of his tongue.

Hermione couldn't look away as she watched him. He licked at her inner thighs briefly, lapping up some of the sticky fluid smeared across the flesh there before finally pulling her knickers back into place as she lifted herself from the seat to help him. “I did tell you that you wouldn't shock me. As you can see, I am fully capable of submitting. I enjoy it on occasion.”

Hermione shuddered as he placed a kiss against the juncture of her thighs through the lacy material, and she could feel the ghostly promise of his warm breath on her clit. “He didn’t actually stop,” she whined.

“Well, we don’t have the time. If we did, I wouldn’t stop either.”

“You’re just so good at being the one in charge, I never thought...”

“Yes, I so rarely get to indulge. Apparently, I’m intimidating.” He grinned. “We can speak more on this later. Knowing that I wasn't completely off base is enough for the moment. Right now though, we really do need to discuss business, and we'll need to keep this short. Not that I'm complaining, but we did use up most of our time already.”

Hermione nodded as he shifted back onto his heels and stood up with a fluid grace that displayed the strength in his lean form.

“You’re right,” she replied and her legs didn't wobble quite so much as she stood, and moved towards her forgotten bag.

She glanced over at him. He had retrieved his wand and was busying himself by cleaning up the mess he had made. “You just looked so good sitting there, I had to test out that amulet you gave me.”

“It wasn’t really meant to be used as a toy, and you all but admitted that you were already planning to seduce me.” When Hermione looked up again, a wistful smile teased the corner of his mouth as
the now repaired instruments and bottles lifted into the air, jerked along on an invisible string with the movements of his wand and plopped themselves down onto the desk. “How long did it take you, by the way?”

She rolled her eyes in annoyance. “Longer than I expected. You could’ve just told me what it did.”

“And deny you the thrill of figuring it out on your own?” Lucius asked, gesturing for her to take a seat and hoisted himself up onto the desk with ease. “No, I couldn’t do such a thing. I have the feeling that your thirst for knowledge surpasses even my own. Besides, I had a reason.”

“What reason?” she asked as she slid into the chair again gingerly.

“After I recruited you, I noticed how much time you spent in my library. How could I not, when I all but had to drag you out of there to join me for dinner? If it took you a week to solve it-”

“Five days.”

“-then that’s five days back here, in a relatively normal routine. Five more days than it would have been otherwise, so that hopefully no one would suspect what you were up to, because I suspect that you’ve spent every spare minute possible in the restricted section since then.”

“So, did you notice when I was using the amulet?” she continued, unable to deny his accusation.

He shook his head. “It felt like a daydream, which is kind of the point. The wearer of the amulet will pass by people unobserved. Well, you may have noticed it’s not only people. Interact with them, and they’ll think they’re… imagining things. I take it your little experiment means you’ve avoided actually touching anyone.”

“I couldn’t risk it without knowing what would happen. I may have been able to translate it, but I still haven’t found any records of it in the library.”

“It’s called a shaman stone. You might find a mention or two in the library, though you would have to dig deep. It’s incredibly rare,” he agreed, “but a necessary acquisition worth the cost.”

Hermione frowned in confusion. “Then how did you know about it?”

“Most of my ancestors have kept incredibly detailed journals. The record of their mistakes and successes have often served as guides for subsequent generations. When he arrived in this country, William the first may have written off certain tribes as inferior, not worth his time, but Armand Malfoy did not. He mentions the stones several times in his writings.”

Hermione nodded in understanding. That explained why some of the runes carved into the stone had not been truly Norse in origin. There must have been an intermingling of both magic and language between those tribes those many centuries ago. “But no one actually knows I'm there? Right?”

“They really shouldn't. It was meant to be used by tribal shamans to observe their marks unawares. They could claim to have what they called ‘the sight’ but it was really just the power of the stone. Why do you ask?”

Hermione chewed on her lower lip, tapping her foot against the stone floor. “It's just that when I checked the headmaster's office, I couldn't shake the feeling that he knew I was there. Maybe I was being paranoid, though.”

“Perhaps.” It worried her that he didn’t sound convinced himself. And then, “Then again, it is
Dumbledore we’re talking about. Did he see you activate it?”

“Why? Will that negate the effects?”

He nodded.

She thought hard back to that day. The alcove had been dark. No one had spared a glance in her direction. “No. There's no way he saw.” She was sure of it. “So, what should I do?”

“Has he provided any indication that he knows?”

Hermione shook her head. “He keeps to himself. No one really sees much of him this year, not even Harry.”

“I would tell you not to use the amulet, but I'm sure there's little chance of that happening, so instead, I'll simply say to keep avoiding him and remain cautious. Your pressing tasks are completed anyway.” He indicated the items she clutched in her hands. Hermione handed the two basilisk fangs over to him, and he turned them over in his hands carefully, inspecting them briefly before setting them to the side.

“I think we’ve made a mistake though,” Hermione stated without preamble.

His head snapped up at that. “How so?”

“The pattern. I think we’ve got it wrong because the artefacts important to Godric Gryffindor are accounted for. Professor Dumbledore has most of them in his office and you've already checked the rest. The sword was the only thing that had enough power and I know it can't be one.”

“And how do you know that?”

“The sword came to Harry in the chamber. It helped him kill the basilisk. Then he destroyed the diary. There's no way it's a horcrux. Besides, ‘the sword only takes in that which makes it stronger’. That's why it powerful enough to set off my spell. It's not because it's a horcrux.”

He mulled over this information for several moments before speaking, and the resignation in his voice was clear. “He did always hate Gryffindor. I was so certain... What about Ravenclaw?”

“Nothing in the headmaster’s office. I think we can safely cross off the painting. It’s never been definitively traced back to Rowena Ravenclaw. That was all rumor and conjecture, and from my research it looks like it never even passed through her hands. The diadem has been lost for centuries. If we're looking to make sure, it’s the most likely candidate.” She held a sheaf of parchment out to him, information to cross reference with his own research, and he added it to the pile after looking it over.

“But no luck finding it yet?”

“People have been looking for it for hundreds of years.”

“And someone has to find it eventually. If it is a horcrux, then someone already did.”

Hermione heaved a heavy sigh. She wished that she had as much confidence as he appeared to. “As for Slytherin? His locket-”

Lucius cut her off with a wave of his hand. “I actually have a lead on it.”

“That’s excellent,” Hermione replied, rejoicing at the first bit of good news yet.
Lucius nodded absently. “I’ll retrieve it as soon as I have a confirmed location. If we’re right, we’re one step closer.”

“And if not?”

“I’ll put out more feelers if I can, but the Dark Lord is suspicious right now.” He looked as if he were going to say something else, but remained silent. Thinking.

“You know it’s because you moved Draco. If you’d just-”

Lucius turned on her, no longer deep in thought, and the anger radiating off him was palpable.

“If I had just what? Go ahead. Finish that sentence. Tell me that I should have left him at Hogwarts. Tell me that Dumbledore would protect him. I’ve known firsthand the extent of that old fool’s protection. Tell me that I should have left my son in harm’s way,” he interrupted, dangerously.

Lucius pulled at his sleeve, baring his left forearm, and said, “I was his age when I received this, following in my father’s footsteps. He gave me to him. The things he made me do… The things I did willingly… Now that I’ve seen him for what he is, I’m not giving him my son without a fight.”

“I didn’t mean it that way. I didn’t know. I’m sorry for suggesting… it’s no secret that Draco and I never got along, but I’ve never wished him dead.”

He pulled his sleeve back into place, expression turning pensive as the sudden anger in him drained away. “I made a choice to protect my family. I’ll deal with the consequences of that choice, and I’ll do whatever I have to do to keep them safe.”

“How suspicious is he? Is it bad?” Hermione asked, worried for him.

“Well it isn’t good,” he laughed mirthlessly.

“Why the breakout? What’s Voldemort up to?”

“He’s rebuilding his army, but no one really knows yet,” Lucius replied, seeming grateful for the change in topic. Truthfully, Hermione was grateful too. “It’s something to do with Potter. He’s preparing him for something, something about a prophecy but he’s been unsurprisingly tight-lipped about it. I only know because it's retrieval has been one of my assigned tasks.”

“Harry’s been having bad dreams. He won’t say much, but I’m sure they’re about Voldemort.”

“I doubt they’re dreams. From what I can gather, their minds are linked somehow.” He shrugged at her look of astonishment. “That’s how he’s preparing him. That’s another reason you can’t let anyone know what you’re doing.”

“He’s my friend, Lucius. He’s practically family. Do you really expect me to do nothing?” She shot him a dark look.

“Then do what you can to look after him, but keep him in the dark.” He seemed wholly unsympathetic to her dilemma. “I did warn you that you’d have to be ruthless.”

“Knowing doesn’t make it easier.”

“No, it doesn’t,” he agreed, speaking more softly. “Draco doesn’t even know why I sent him away. He hasn’t even spoken to me since I did.”
Hermione couldn't even imagine Draco refusing to speak to Lucius, not after all the times he had threatened just about everyone around him with his father's wrath. “What did you tell him?”

“I didn't tell him anything. I couldn't risk it. He probably thinks that I’m terribly disappointed in him. It's possible I've lost him, but if that's the price I have to pay, at least he'll be alive to hate me.”

“Is he the reason you switched sides?”

Lucius nodded, a small smile touching his lips as he hopped off the desk. “A good reason. One of several actually.”

“And the others?” she inquired hopefully.

He strode forward, and drew her to her feet by the hand, that smile only growing wider, “Another time, perhaps. I think we’ve covered everything on the agenda today, don’t you?”

“No quite,” she sighed to hide her disappointment. “How will you contact me again? The same way?”

He nodded. “If possible, although, I don’t anticipate being able to do so any time soon.”

“There aren’t any more governors’ meetings scheduled.”

“Correct. You might receive a letter, coded of course, but unless it's an emergency, we probably won't meet on school grounds again.”

And she knew he wouldn't want to meet in a public area like Hogsmeade, especially if he thought he was being watched.

Lucius shrugged lightly, crossing the room to where he had left his cloak when he had first arrived.

“I suppose, if necessary I would just have to pay Severus a visit; have a drink and catch up with a dear old friend, but I'm hoping that won’t be required.” He pulled a small wooden box from the depths of his cloak. “I have a gift for you. A portkey that will get you into the manor so I won’t have to abduct you again. To activate it, simply hold it and say the Malfoy family words. Do you know what those are?”

Hermione carefully opened the box, but didn’t answer him. Of course, she knew. She was the school swot after all. Nestled inside on black velvet lining, was a small, white, marble chess piece.

“You’re giving me a portkey activated by the words ‘Purity will always conquer’? Is this some kind of joke? Everyone knows there are only two types.”

“Oh really?” Lucius replied in that smug tone of his tinged with amusement.

“Aren’t there?” If you're asking the question, you know the answer already, she thought. And then she remembered that the Malfoys had been deeply involved in ministry politics on more than one occasion. “How many are there?”

“There are actually three. This kind is highly regulated, reserved for official ministry business only. As such, the official I bribed to insure the paperwork went through and subsequently disappeared, was under the impression that it was meant to be mine. Besides,” he replied, the corner of his mouth quirking into a devilish grin, “it could be argued that I conquered you quite thoroughly a short while ago. Now see, that was a joke.”

She rolled her eyes, shooting him a dark look, but he remained rather pleased with himself. Lucius
Malfy cracking horrible jokes and loving it was something she never would have believed if she hadn’t just witnessed it for herself. “And when do you expect me to use it?”

“On the first day of March break. It would be safer, all things considered, to leave from your home. Hopefully, you can think up a suitable excuse for your absence. You need to begin the practical portion of your Occlumency training. I hope you’re prepared for it.”

Hermione rather hoped she was too. “So, am I just a pawn in your schemes then?” She hefted the box in her hand. “Or am I just reading too much into it?”

Lucius was taken aback. “You don’t play chess?”

She shook her head.

“Well you should.”

“Harry and Ron do. It’s just, I’ve always thought it was barbaric.” Being forced to play it in real life had only cemented the feeling in her mind.

“That’s just the surface. I’ve always thought it was a rather elegant game, if can look past the window dressing. Why don’t you give it a try? Chess is like war, and any good strategist plays. As for your question, many people underestimate the pawn. If you’re not paying attention, it can become the most powerful piece on the board.” He thought about it for a second. “In that case, I suppose you’re right. I guess I do see you as a pawn in my schemes.”

Hermione took a moment to consider his words, still not certain she could go beyond the concept of the anthropomorphic pieces destroying each other, but willing to at least give it a shot.

“So, I guess that’s it?” She closed the box, secreting it deep inside her bag.

“Yes, I suppose so,” Lucius replied slowly, sounding as reluctant to leave as she felt. They each began redressing, the silence growing thick between them, and there was no sound in the room save for the rustling of clothes. Hermione snuck a small glance over at him to find him watching her, and he looked away shrugging into his cloak, almost guilty. She turned away herself and concentrated on tucking in her shirt, a pink blush staining her cheeks.

“You know,” Lucius said, breaking the brewing silence, “Severus says you have potential.”

“Really?” Her voice floated back to him, a bit distractedly as she fumbled with the buttons of her cardigan. “He said that? Because he always calls me a swotty, little know-it-all.”

“Well, he doesn’t think you’ll amount to anything.” Hermione glanced over again, and Lucius was no longer hiding his interest in watching her dress.

“Well, he doesn’t think you’ll amount to anything.” Hermione glanced over again, and Lucius was no longer hiding his interest in watching her dress.

“Which he’s told me as well.”

“He's noticed you, which for Severus is saying something, but he doesn't impress easily. My advice? Don’t just memorize the potions. He considers the recipes guidelines. If you want to impress him, you need to think that way too.”

“Why are you telling me this?” she asked him, slight confusion on her face.

“No reason.” He shrugged at her as he brushed off his jacket.

“No, really. Tell me. Why do you care?”
“So that you can prove him wrong. It doesn't happen often, but I like it when Severus is wrong. Just the idea of his shocked and horrified expression when it happens... You’ll have to describe it for me in great detail.” She took in the mischievous glint in his eyes and the playful smirk. Lucius wanted to improve her potions skills for the sole purpose of vexing his friend? He appeared practically giddy with the thought. It was actually a little unnerving.

When he looked to her again, he looked as impeccable as he always did. She felt more or less presentable, but he was staring at her oddly. “What? Is something wrong?”

“Wrong?” Lucius shook his head, laughing. “No.”

He closed the distance, his eyes flicking over various parts of her until he stood so close she could feel the warmth of his body. He reached up, smoothing down her curls.

“No... You look,” he leaned closer, pressing his nose against the side of her neck, inhaling deeply, “and you smell, like you’ve just been thoroughly fucked. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

She ducked her head in excitement and embarrassment. Why did she like it so much when he spoke that way? Lucius drew her head up, his fingers curled beneath her chin, encouraging her to meet his gaze. “Shall I do something about that, or would you prefer to make your roommates jealous?”

She didn’t really care if they were jealous or not. As far as Hermione was concerned, they had plenty of information already, too much, in fact. If she left the evidence in place, they would probably think it was Cormac, and she really didn't want anyone thinking that. At the thought, her embarrassment gave way to a wave of sudden and unexpected guilt and she was speaking before she realized it. “I’ve been with someone, Lucius.”

She didn’t know why she suddenly felt the need to blurt it out, to confess as it were, but now the words were out there, and she couldn’t take them back. And then she realized how those words might be interpreted. “No, wait I mean- I don't mean that. It’s just that I’ve been out with-”

He leaned forward, his tongue darting out to lick her cheek, tasting the traces of dried arousal he’d smeared across her jaw earlier.

“I don’t care,” he stated simply, his breath a warm whisper across her neck as he planted a gentle, open-mouthed kiss against her sensitive flesh.

“Did you expect me to play the part of a jealous lover? Get angry? Forbid you from seeing anyone else?”

She nodded slowly. Yes, she had expected all those things. Lucius didn’t strike her as the type to share.

He looked at her, his expression serious. “There are things you haven’t asked of me, that past lovers have traditionally asked by this point. ‘What is this thing between us?’ for example.”

She shrugged lightly. “I don’t need to be told. I know what this is. It’s sex. It’s not like we’re in love or anything.” The term ‘business partners with benefits’ flitted through her mind.

“No, that’s true, but it hasn’t stopped others from asking... or making demands, even when they knew.”

Hermione looked at him skeptically. “You chose me because of my brain. I’m smart enough to know what kind of marriage contracts your family would use.”
“If you know all this, then tell me, how could I possibly demand exclusivity, if the most you could ever hope for, is to be my mistress?” he asked her, stroking her cheek softly.

“Considering your reputation and our history, I didn’t expect to encounter that kind of attitude from you, that you would see it that way.”

“As it happens, I tend to be incredibly generous with my lovers.”

“So I’m finding out.” Lucius had proven to be a frustrating mix of exactly as and nothing like she had expected.

“To answer your unspoken question, date whomever you wish, and I’ll satisfy those desires you’re too timid to tell anyone else about for as long as you want. The reason you keep coming back to me is because you realize that with me you don’t have to hide what excites you. You wouldn’t have bitten me otherwise. Now then, did you want me to clean you up?” His wand was at the ready.

“No,” Hermione answered decisively. Lucius was right. He was showing her who she truly was. Bit by bit, he was illuminating the darkest parts of her, the parts she hadn’t known existed, bringing them into the light, and she didn’t have to hide what he revealed. Not with him. She had marked him, he hadn’t marked her, and after this encounter, she felt that she needed to be claimed by him in some way. Wearing his scent a little while longer would have to do.

Lucius’ eyes were still locked with her own, watching her intently. He lowered his wand, reached under her skirt, pushed aside the sticky fabric between her legs, and boldly swiped his thumb through the mess still seeping from her. Hermione gasped when he pressed his thumb inside, a rush of wetness accompanying the intrusion.

When he withdrew his hand, the digit was sticky with the creamy fluid and he reverently brushed it over both her lips before pushing into her open mouth to press against her tongue. She licked it off with a little moan.

“What about now?” he asked, drawing his hand back, curiosity shining in his eyes.

Hermione's tongue darted out carefully to swipe over her bottom lip. She smiled and stood up on her toes as much as she could, which wasn’t much, and when she could go no higher, grasped the front of his cloak, pulling him down the rest of the way. Lucius opened his mouth as their lips met, his tongue drawing hers inside to play with his own.

“No,” she whispered, and then murmured against his lips, “and I don’t want you to either.”

He released an amused exhalation. “Who would have thought the good little Gryffindor would be such a deviant? I get the distinct feeling,” he replied, a predatory gleam in his eyes, “that you have yet to show me what you’re capable of. I would be quite interested to find out.”

Lucius looked at her pensively for a beat, as if he were making an incredibly tough decision, and then finally pulled a bag of coins from the inner recesses of his cloak. He pressed the pouch into her hand. “Are you familiar with Dervish & Banges?”

“Yes.” She had been required to take her Time Turner in for minor repairs a couple of times.

“Unbeknownst to most, they cater discreetly to a select clientele. I’d like you to consider the possibilities you’d like to explore. Ask to view their reserve collection, and purchase anything you require.”

“How will I know what that is?” She had never done anything of the sort before.
“You said you've done your research.” Lucius laughed playfully when she punched him in the arm. “You'll do fine. Some of the equipment can be quite shocking, but don't feel as if you need to choose anything. If you aren't comfortable with it, leave it on the shelf. And most of the larger pieces can be left as well,” he finished.

“And if I go over budget?” Hermione asked cheekily.

“You could probably buy half the shop with what I just handed you. Bring your purchases with you. We’ll see about putting them to use.”

He smiled, his eyes taking on a faraway look as he considered the possibilities she might come up with, and then he seemed to sober a bit. “There is one more thing. I'm not really considered a good dominant.”

Lucius cut off her protest with a raised hand.

“It's not a question of skill, I've been told I'm too lenient, but then,” he paused a moment before continuing, “it isn't the dominating or the submitting aspect that truly interests me.”

Hermione recognized the monumental nature of the statement, and she thought back to that feeling she had of a question he was holding back. Lucius was apparently entertaining the thought of asking it at some point.

“But then I’m not certain you'd make a good submissive anyway.” He raised an eyebrow at her skeptical look. “Too combative. And stubborn.”

Well he was right about that.

“If you want proper training, that won’t be me, but I can teach you the basics. After all, being a bit wild doesn't excuse your behavior. It only makes the rules that much more important.” He grinned at her. “You have to know when you're breaking them.”

“I like breaking rules.”

“Of course, you do.” Lucius kissed her lightly on the cheek and turned to leave.

She watched him slip through the door as silently as he had entered. With the amulet, it wasn’t necessary to wait and make sure there was distance between them, but she still needed a moment to gather her thoughts and her things. She was officially in a sexual relationship with a Death Eater for as long as she was interested. Aside from hoping that it all didn’t blow up in her face, she was surprisingly okay with the arrangement. She wanted to know who she really was at the end of the day, and whether he was good or bad or something in between, Lucius could help her discover that without judgment. He was wholeheartedly encouraging it.
As he made his way back through the halls, Lucius was in an incredibly good mood, the spring in his step fueled by an utterly satisfying shag and the unexpected acquisition of a regular playmate. Regular was, in truth, something of a misnomer given logistical considerations. As such, he intended to take full advantage of their time together during the forthcoming holiday break.

“Mr. Malfoy?” He stopped in his tracks, his good mood dampened by the unwelcome voice.

“You’re still here?” Lucius turned, the good manners beaten into him preventing him from simply ignoring the witch and continuing on his way.

“Yes, obviously.” He wasn’t, however, above letting his displeasure with the situation show in his voice, though it seemed to go unnoticed. She stared at him with that same, insipid smile she had displayed all throughout the afternoon session.

She crooked her head to the side, studying him. “Why? The other governors have all left.”

Lucius snorted inelegantly, though from her position, he doubted she could hear it. He was almost embarrassed to admit that he shared the same house with this woman. How someone so obvious in their ambitions could have been sorted into Slytherin was a mystery to him. But then he supposed she didn't fit in any other house either.

Her insecurities were on full display. Even a Weasley could have picked up on it. Her hands clasped in front of her defensively. Not a single hair was out of place and though her outfit was quite garish, it was impeccably spotless. For Lucius, the sum of her parts painted a picture of someone desperately attempting to legitimize their presence and authority.

It didn’t escape his attention, either, that she had called to him from halfway up the staircase she was standing on. It was clear from her stance that she was neither ascending nor descending. The maneuver, coupled with her body language, was a sad display of dominance from someone who could never truly wield power because they didn’t understand where that power came from.

Lucius had learnt long ago that height alone wasn’t the advantage most thought it was, and had perfected the art of looking down at people who were much taller than himself. He knew they had an audience; could hear the hushed whispering. There were about a dozen students within earshot and more trickling closer with each passing moment. Umbridge had intended to have an audience when she confronted him so that word could spread throughout the school of how she had bested Lucius Malfoy. It was just another way of attempting to establish her authority.

It was more of a brute force tactic than he usually preferred, but turning an opponent’s methods against them was wildly effective. He would demonstrate to the students present how to properly exercise authority and give them a show. It just wouldn’t be the one she’d had in mind. He favored her with his infamous Malfoy sneer and gestured that she should move closer. He was unsurprised
to see the slight tick indicating a break in her composure and he waited.

Her internal war was priceless. She had to either give up her inquiry and leave, ascending the staircase or give up her position and descend to continue conversing with him. With either choice, she lost the advantage she had so carefully attempted to cultivate. Her hesitation at least conveyed that she was smart enough to realize it. In the end, she chose the latter, possibly reasoning that running away from a conversation she had initiated was the more humiliating option.

“As I said,” she stated as she reached the bottom, “the last governor left over an hour ago. You have no further obligations here. Not anymore.”

Lucius knew what she hinted at but did not rise to take the bait. He narrowed his eyes at her. “Are you insinuating that I should be deficient in my duties as a board member? As a governor, my responsibility is to the school and the welfare of its students regardless of any personal stake I may have in the matter.”

Umbridge floundered for a moment, terrified that she may have unwittingly insulted him. “I meant no offense. I too am merely concerned for the school.” A chorus of quiet twitters resounded within the stone walls. Clearly no one present believed her.

“Then you should take no issue with my rather thorough inspection.” He did not voice it as a question, giving her no room to protest. “It’s been too long since I’ve performed one and there have been a great many changes of late. One specific name is associated with most of the grievances I’ve heard regarding these changes.” The disdain was obvious in his tone and Umbridge most certainly noticed it.

She was growing angry from her loss of control in the situation. He could tell from the way her jaw clenched and her lips pressed together in a thin line, and he enjoyed drawing it out of her slowly while he maintained his composure.

“According to Educational Decree Number 26, chatting with students is strictly banned.” She smiled grotesquely, seeming quite pleased with herself.

Lucius delivered his reply without missing a beat. “For faculty, yes. It’s a decree which makes the pettiness of its issuer abundantly clear. The board, however, is above such concerns. Your rules don’t apply to me.”

Umbridge lifted her chin haughtily, attempting to draw herself up, not that it would have done much good with Lucius towering above her and clearly with the upper hand. “Not yet.” He quirked an eyebrow and tilted his head. She must have taken his amusement for concern because she only continued to dig herself deeper. “I work directly under Cornelius. I am his right hand at Hogwarts. Cornelius heeds my advice.”

The throng pressed in around them and Lucius smiled disarmingly, speaking loudly enough for his voice to carry. “So, you have no wish to offend yet you will stoop to an unveiled threat?” He clicked his tongue disapprovingly. “You may be the ministry’s hand here at Hogwarts, although I seriously doubt the veracity of that assertion, but that still makes you part of the puppet.” Lucius brushed some invisible lint off his cloak before continuing in a conversational tone. “You do know that Cornelius and I are old friends? Were I to call in a favor, he wouldn’t hesitate to cut that hand off.” He smiled charmingly at her. “You should be grateful that you aren’t important enough to warrant such consideration.” And without any effort, the smile changed into something quite chilling. “Stick to bullying those who can’t bite you back.” He turned on his heel and continued down the hall toward the apparition point, leaving her gawping at his back. News of their confrontation would spread like Fiendfyre and consume the school by morning. The thought
worked to replenish his good mood, but he was rather disappointed that there would be no follow through on his threat to be rid of her. He was already stretched too thin on favors as it was, and there were more pressing concerns than a low-level ministry lackey, no matter how much he might hate her.

When he arrived back home, the house elves were scurrying about, more agitated than usual. One of the creatures nearly collided with him, laden with several large trunks. It shrank back with a whimper, shaking.

“What in Merlin’s name is going on here?” It was so frightened, he thought it might spontaneously combust at his feet.

“My doing, I’m afraid, Darling.” Lucius turned at the sound to see Narcissa descending the main staircase toward him. It had been months since she had been back to the manor and she looked just as beautiful and regal as the last time he’d seen her. He hadn’t been completely honest with Hermione, something he regretted, but he wasn’t quite sure how to explain, or how she might take it. There was more between them than mere mutual respect, but then, he’d always found it difficult to accurately describe their relationship.

“I wasn’t expecting you, Dear.”

“Sort of a spur of the moment decision. It’s good to see you, Darling.” Narcissa leaned in to kiss his cheek. Lucius pulled back instinctively, earning himself an odd look. She grinned knowingly. “Ever the gentleman, Lucius.”

He averted his eyes from her amused gaze. “It’s just disrespectful, ill-mannered to…”

“To kiss your wife, with the scent of your lover still on your skin?” she finished for him. He nodded. “It’s not Severus, though I hope for your sake, people believe it was. Witch or wizard?”

“Witch,” he conceded, lowering his eyes. “Am I really so obvious?”

“Only to me, but then we have known each other for such a long time. Although, if someone were paying attention… well, you don’t look quite as impeccable as usual.” Narcissa cupped his face, encouraging him to meet her gaze once again. “Is she the one helping you?” He nodded. “I think you should keep this one around.” Narcissa announced. “She suits you. I haven’t seen you look so content in years. It must have been quite the experience.”

A small, brief smile flashed across his face. “Definitely compatible. Completely? I don’t know, but if not, it’s certainly enough.”

“Oh, so that’s why you’re so satisfied then. It would seem she hasn’t shied away from your darkness,” she teased.

Lucius had told Hermione that with him she didn't have to hide what she wanted, and unbelievably, deep inside, he felt the same. “No, not yet…”

“Yet? You're actually planning to tell her.” Narcissa exclaimed in surprise. “That hasn't happened since…”

“I know. It's on my mind. And it worries me. If I lose control again with her-”

“You said it yourself. It's on your mind. You're aware. All you can do is give her the choice.”
Lucius smiled warmly. It was in these small moments between them that he truly regretted their incompatibility. They’d grown up together, friends first, and when their betrothal had been announced, they had truly given it a shot and had quickly discovered how different they were from each other. She had always preferred her lovers barely legal and scrawny, though he had no room to talk this time considering his current lover, and his tastes were far beyond anything she was willing to engage in. He’d already played games with Hermione that Narcissa had flat-out refused to try and he’d barely scratched the surface. Lucius still counted himself lucky despite their differences. He could have done much worse for a partner. He could have ended up with her crazy sister.

He gestured to the commotion surrounding them. “So, are you finally moving the rest of your things out? Just in time. I was planning to burn it all.” he joked lightly.

“No,” she smiled back. “I have plenty at the villa.” The warm smile faded from her face. “Draco has decided to stay with me in France over the break and then at the end of term as well.”

Lucius sighed heavily, shutting his eyes tight at the emotion that statement brought with it. He had expected as much, had counted on it. He still hadn’t been prepared to hear it. “How is he?”

“He’s still angry with you but I think he’s actually happier there.”

“Is he truly?” Lucius asked hopefully. In the end, his son’s happiness and freedom was everything Lucius was working towards.

“He’ll never admit that to you.”

“If he ever even speaks to me again.” He knew it had been the right decision to make but it caused his mood to darken nonetheless.

“He’ll come around in time. He made the Quidditch team. A chaser this time. You’d be proud,” she said, trying to cheer him up.

“He was never right for seeker. I shouldn't have indulged him.”

“I’m proud of you, Lucius. You have always acted in the best interests of this family, regardless of your own desires, and I will not forget that.”

He looked down at the comforting hand she had placed on his arm, thinking about how different things could be, if he had never taken the mark, if he had defied his father just one more time. But there was nothing he could do to change the past, so he pushed the thought aside. “Will you be staying for dinner?”

“Yes, but then I really must be off. The longer I stay…”

“Yes, I know.” The longer she stayed, the more likely it became that she and Draco would get pulled back into the war. And that he could not have.

Chapter End Notes

Hope everyone enjoyed this chapter. I wanted to be nice to Narcissa for once and I like the idea of Lucius and Narcissa being on the same side.
So this chapter was ready to go much sooner than I anticipated. If you've read any of my other works, you know that Hermione is usually the one who has a bad time. Well, it's Lucius' turn now. And, oh boy, it's about to get dark in here, because this is it. Many have been wondering what Lucius' deep dark desires are, and I don't flat out say it in this chapter, but it's not hard to guess. This one is the result of what Voldemort got Lucius to do after his father's rejection of him. I know it's been a while, but Abraxas kink-shamed him which ended up leaving him vulnerable to Voldemort's influence. The next chapter touches a bit more on what that kink is, but even then, it's still going to be twisted up because of what happens in this one. Remember, it's always darkest before the dawn.

So, new tags added. You might want to take a look at them, but it's kind of there in the chapter title too.

I didn't think there was enough conflict in my story thus far, so I wanted to up the stakes. Hopefully I managed to do that and keep Lucius sympathetic and likeable, despite what he does in this chapter and the next one. Let me know what you think, and thanks to everyone for reading, commenting, and all the lovely kudos! Keep them coming!

Hermione flipped a page in the back of her textbook rereading the passage thoroughly. She thought for a second and then jotted down an entry in her notebook. With the war ramping up, healing potions would unfortunately become a necessity. Perhaps, she thought, if she could increase the potency it would allow-

“I don't recall assigning you to work on healing potions today, Miss Granger.” Her head snapped up. Professor Snape towered over her looking down sternly at her notes. The entire class was looking at her, identical looks of fear plastered on the faces of everyone surrounding her. Professor Snape had evidently been observing from over her shoulder for some time, and she hadn't even noticed the classroom grow quiet.

“No, sir you didn't,” she hesitantly replied. Hermione wondered if the fear in her classmates’ eyes was reflected on her own face.

“Then perhaps you should tell me why you have chosen not to work on your assignment.” The tone of his voice dared her to give him the slightest reason to assign a punishment: to her, to the entire class. It clearly didn't matter to him. One was as good as the other.

She closed her notebook and cleared her throat meekly. “I’ve finished it, sir.”

“You've finished? Already?” He sniffed disdainfully, raising a skeptical eyebrow, and peered over the rim of her cauldron. She didn’t blame him for not believing her. Everyone else was still working. “If I were to check your work right now, you are confident it would receive a passing grade?”
“Yes, sir. I am.” She may have finished earlier than everyone else, but it was certainly within the allotted time-frame dictated by the potion’s directions.

He drew his robes closed around himself, crossing his arms over his chest and canted his head to the side. “So confident that you would be willing to wager extra work for the entire class against it?”

Somehow the room grew even quieter. It was a trick question, he intended to punish them all, and answering in the negative would have made the punishment so much worse.

She nodded. “Yes, I would. Sir.”

Without another word, he flicked the sleeves of his robes back, and set about checking the potion. Hermione waited patiently, and the rest of the class held their collective breath awaiting his verdict. He turned to glare at her with those deep, dark eyes of his, and examined her intently as if he were looking directly into her soul. It was a look she had never seen on him before. He held her gaze so long, and she was so unnerved by it, she felt sick to her stomach.

“The rest of you, stop what you are doing, and get out,” he barked at them without ever raising his voice or turning away from her.

She didn’t turn around as she heard items thrown hastily into bags and the rapid patter of her classmates heading for the door. No one had the courage to try and help her or remind Professor Snape that he wasn’t actually allowed to speak with her outside of his lessons. They weren’t willing to risk getting caught in his wrath too. Professor Snape never broke eye contact, and eventually the door drifted closed, trapping her alone in the room with him.

Severus looked for any sign of nervousness or deception in the girl’s body language, but through long years of dealing with students, he recognized only the apprehension associated with getting into trouble and curiosity about her impending punishment.

She was markedly calm, the kind of calm that came from knowing that she had done nothing wrong, but Severus had his doubts. There was an odd familiarity to her potion that he couldn’t place. It was clearly her work, he had observed her working on it, and no one else in the class could have done half as well, but at the same time, it wasn’t her work at all, not what he was used to getting. It was so much more than he had ever expected from her. He was tempted to take a quick peek in her mind but sadly had no grounds to do so. That would have cleared up his confusion immediately.

When he finally spoke again, his voice was deceptively dangerous. “Whom have you been working with?”

Hermione swallowed nervously before answering. “I’m sorry, sir. I don’t know what you-”

“Don’t lie to me, Miss Granger.” He ground out. “No one improves that quickly,” he gestured to the cauldron still on the table, “in such a short amount of time. Someone has been helping you, someone who doesn’t attend this school, and I want to know who it is.”

That’s what this was about? Her potion was too good for him to think she had done it? Hermione felt an involuntary swell of pride at the revelation.

“No one helped me, sir.” It was mostly the truth. Just a bit of a nudge really.

“I’ve just been thinking lately that someone had to invent all this at some point, that they had to be the first to come up with it, and they wouldn’t have had a book to go by. I just want to be the best I
His features softened somewhat, for him anyway, and his expression turned thoughtful. Hermione waited with bated breath for his response. If she had known he would react in such a way, she might have thought twice about taking Lucius’ suggestions. Well, actually that was a lie. Even if she had known, the promise of a greater understanding of magic would have been too much for her to ignore. Professor Snape wasn’t really angry. She knew that. He was just caught off guard by the unexpected and seeking to understand it himself. That didn’t mean, of course, that he wouldn’t still punish her. He was never in a good mood normally and this year he was so much worse.

“Could you do it again?” he quietly questioned after a sustained pause.

She looked up from the desk and saw only curiosity in his eyes. “I believe so, sir.”

He nodded near imperceptibly. “Then you will serve detention tonight.” He held up a hand quickly at her protest. “It is not meant to punish you, Miss Granger. I merely wish to observe your technique more closely without worrying that Longbottom will blow up the classroom in the interim, and certain current restrictions make that difficult.”

Hermione was astonished. Professor Snape was offering her a private lesson. Severus Snape! He famously hated students, Gryffindors especially, and Harry’s inner circle most of all. Her gaze landed on her bubbling cauldron. Just how good was her potion anyway? From what she understood, even Dumbledore had found it necessary to bully him into tutoring Harry.

“I would be honored, professor.” And it was a great honor in her opinion, to have the chance to learn directly from someone as talented as he was. A master, Lucius had said, and she knew he didn’t lavish such praise on just anyone. Professor Snape merely nodded once at her, and turned on his heel to begin tidying the room in preparation for the next class.

“So, what did the greasy git have to say? Are we all going to get punished?” Ron whined. “I knew you should have just done it like everyone else. I told you not to muck about with Snape!”

“Professor Snape, Ron, and no one’s getting punished. Except me. Well, kind of.” She watched idly as her knight ran a sword through Ron’s bishop’s chest. Wizard’s chess was still barbaric, but she could see what Lucius meant about strategy. That part she actually enjoyed, and it was nice to have an activity in common with the boys; something they could do together that wasn’t Quidditch or fighting against Voldemort.

“That doesn’t make any sense. How do you kind of get punished by Snape?” Harry glanced up at her from his charms homework, an incredulous look on his face.

“Professor Snape, Harry. He gave me detention tonight but it’s not really detention. It’s more of a skills assessment, I guess you could say.”

“He’s giving you a private lesson? Seriously? Him? He offered?”

Hermione shrugged. “Apparently I’ve impressed him.” Harry scoffed, shaking his head in what she assumed was irritation. She knew Harry hated Professor Snape. There was so much animosity between them that he would never admit how great a wizard he truly was. The two seemed stuck in a cycle of mutual hatred, each content to blame the other for things beyond their control. Hermione wondered what had happened between Professor Snape and Harry’s father all those years ago in the halls of the school, the same halls they walked every day. She didn’t think that Professor Snape...
truly hated Harry. It was more likely that he was merely stuck replaying the past because he saw so much of James Potter in him. To her, it almost seemed as if he was stuck because Harry's dad had died before any of the wrongs had managed to be righted, if they could have been righted at all, that was. Knowing the details of the relationship between the two of them would probably go a long way towards fixing the one between he and Harry.

Ron’s remaining bishop throttled her rook, crushing it into a pile of rubble. She slid one of her knights past, looking to Ron expectantly.

Ron reached forward, a grin on his face, but then he pulled his hand back at the last moment, made a face and groaned, grimacing as he considered his moves. “You’re getting good at this game, ‘Mione. I thought you were supposed to be complete rubbish.”

“I am still complete rubbish, Ron. I just started thinking of it a different way. It's helped. There’s a lot of Arithmancy in it, you know.”

“I’ll take your word for it. Everything okay, Harry?” She followed the direction of Ron's gaze.

“Yeah,” but he looked a million miles away.

“Harry?” Hermione prodded.

He scrubbed at his face, though whether from frustration or exhaustion, Hermione didn’t know. “It’s just that, I wish I knew what was behind that door. I can’t shake the feeling that whatever it is, it’s important. It’s driving me mad not knowing.”

“Harry, you know Dumbledore told you not to prod at it. That means it’s not something you should mess around with.”

“The thing is, in my dream, Rookwood was pathetically happy to be earning Voldemort’s praise. I think it means that it’s something that Voldemort needs, something that could turn the tide of this war in his favor.”

Harry’s words concerned her, and Lucius’ warning that Voldemort was trying to manipulate him remained in the back of her mind. “Or he’s playing with you. What if there’s nothing there? What if it’s all just a trick so that he can get you just where he wants you?”

“You know, Harry, ‘Mione might be right.”

“Maybe,” he conceded, “but I don’t think so. No, I saw Lucius Malfoy with Fudge in the ministry. He was up to something. Whatever it was it was on Voldemort’s orders. I think Rookwood’s the same.”

Hermione wanted desperately to tell Harry that Lucius was on their side, but she dared not. Not only had she sworn not to, the boys wouldn’t believe her anyway. She would just have to keep being the voice of reason, and hope that she could stop him from doing anything rash. She feared that was going to be an uphill battle.

Lucius’ black robes swished and swirled around his legs. The leather of his ornately tooled tunic creaked every so often as he walked, and his etched silver mask concealed his troubled features. He worked overtime to occlude his mind, and pull the mask of lies he always wore when he met with his dark lord into place before he reached his destination.
He’d been summoned.

Personally.

That never boded well.

He approached what amounted to the throne room in the house the dark wizard had taken for his own. A figure waited in the corridor outside, swaying from side to side in a strange rhythmic manner, dancing to a tune only she heard in her head. This was not only unexpected, it was most unwelcome.

Bella had always been strange as a young girl. It was, perhaps, the reason his father had adamantly refused the Black family patriarch when he had offered Bella’s hand in marriage, and the obscene dowry that came with it. Perhaps his father had taken her oddities as proof that she was touched by the Black family curse, destined for madness as so many of her house before her. As it turned out, she was more than merely touched by that madness. It consumed her in ways not seen in hundreds of years. Azkaban hadn’t helped matters, and Lucius often didn’t know whether his dark lord terrified him more or his mad sister-in-law. Yes, he was much more powerful, but she was far less predictable. It was no wonder then that she had become his favorite. They were a pair well-matched in their madness.

She stopped him in the hall before he could enter the throne room. She sniffed at him, head turning and moving in a serpent-like manner. Thankfully, behind his mask, she couldn’t see his revulsion. He stood stock still, seemingly not bothered by her scrutiny, giving nothing away. She halted her inspection nearly as quickly as she had begun, pulling back and favoring him with a slow, crazed smile as her eyes ticked up towards his face.

“Hello, brother.”

“Bella.” He didn’t bother correcting her, certain that if she even remembered later on she wouldn’t care. And it gained him nothing to potentially incur her ire. Let her call him by whatever name she wished. It mattered not.

“It’s been ages since Cissy came out to play,” she pouted at him. “You should have brought her along.”

“Narcissa is abroad. You know this,” Lucius answered in a long-suffering tone, as if explaining it to a small child.

“Still…” The single word sounded hopelessly suspicious to his ears.

“The summons. Do you know what it’s about?” He asked, shifting Bella’s focus to slightly less dangerous territory.

“Oh yes, dear brother.” Her smile took on a haunting quality and she appeared wholly possessed by some evil creature. Sadly, he knew it was just her. Possession might have been easier to deal with.

“But you’ll have to find out for yourself.” She placed her hand on his leather-clad chest in far too familiar a manner, caressing slightly, and making his skin crawl.

“We’re all going to thoroughly enjoy it, though. Be sure to put on a good show for us, dearie.” She dropped her hand and stepped aside, allowing him access to the door at last. Judging from her demeanor, nothing good lay in store for him beyond it.

He entered as confidently as he was capable, his head held high. Bellatrix was close on his heels.
and the door clicked closed quietly behind them. When he noticed the room was filled, worry began to gnaw at his gut. So many had rejoined their cause since the breakout. Even beneath the masks, he knew them all. Everyone of importance was gathered for whatever would happen this night, all but Severus, and only one among them aside from Bellatrix wore no mask. He alone didn’t need one. Lucius approached the throne upon which his master lounged, idly stroking his pet’s head. His stride across the room was sure, but Lucius knelt before him, apprehensive.

The Dark Lord appeared almost bored, and the voice that commanded, “Remove your mask,” gave no hint at the thoughts he might be entertaining.

“Yes, my Lord.” Lucius lifted his hand to his face, hoping his nerves didn’t show in the trembling of that hand, and removed the ornate silver mask hiding his features. Once his face was bared, he kept his head respectfully bowed as he knelt before his master, waiting to receive his next command.

It was a long time before his master spoke, and when he did, his words did nothing to put Lucius at ease. “I have wondered of late, just where your loyalties lie, my faithful servant.”

Bollocks, thought Lucius as a sliver of fear swept through his body. This is not good. Severus’ warning came back to him, and he wondered if perhaps his friend hadn’t managed to change their master’s mind after all. Was today the day he died?

“Do you no longer revel in your bloody work, Lucius?”

“My Lord?” he asked, confusion swirling within his mind to mix with the fear. It was now a true struggle to keep his rising panic under control. He was woefully outnumbered. There was no way he could fight his way out. When the time came, he would just have to try and take as many with him as possible, make such a spectacle neither the ministry nor the Prophet could not possibly ignore it. Maybe it would buy Narcissa and Draco enough time to go into hiding.

“I really hadn’t noticed since I’ve returned, other things on my mind you know, but it’s been brought to my attention that it’s been an age since you’ve indulged. No one here can remember the last time you demonstrated your skills. I must confess, I always found it to be rather messy, but I could never deny the artistry present in your brutality.”

Lucius was only marginally relieved because he wasn’t out of the woods yet. Tonight, he realized, was not meant to be the night of his execution though it still could be. And then a wave of revulsion settled in his stomach, threatening to make him sick. He was being tested because he still had not earned back the Dark Lord’s favor, and he knew already what form that test would take.

The Dark Lord was right, he had not ‘indulged’ since his downfall. It hadn’t been necessary. Of course, back then he had enjoyed it. He had taken what he wanted, and part of him hadn’t cared that his partners had been unwilling victims. The Dark Lord had always nurtured the monster inside him, encouraging him to set it free, and in his master’s service he had, many times, so many he couldn't count them all. He had been so drunk on power, basking in his father’s approval at last that he hadn’t thought twice about it.

And then when the war was over, when the Dark Lord was gone, when he could see clearly what he had become, Lucius had been disgusted by what he saw. As far as his continued, enthusiastic support of the Dark Lord, it had been the final nail in the coffin after what had happened with Severus. He had sworn it would never happen again, and yet here he was, and there was nothing he could do. Lucius didn’t delude himself into believing that the Dark Lord’s imminent request was anything other than an order. There were only two options tonight: he would do what was requested of him or he would die.
Lucius wasn’t the only one present in the room who knew this. Thus, the Dark Lord gave no voice to his request. He didn’t have to. Instead, he conjured a scarred, wooden table as two masked, hooded Death Eaters dragged a screaming, sobbing girl into the room. His heart wrenched at the sound, and then it began to pound within his chest, though he couldn't tell if it was from fear or anticipation.

Two wooden pillars rose between himself and the Dark Lord, and the girl was dragged between them, struggling as she was chained at wrist and ankle. Lucius rose with a studied nonchalance, and looked over at the table as the girl was being secured. The gleaming, highly polished instruments, neatly arranged, were as familiar as the back of his hand. The whole setup reminded him of another girl and another dungeon not so terribly long ago.

He set down his mask and lightly caressed the handle of a bone saw before picking up a wicked-looking, curved dagger. He’d discovered muggle bandage shears worked much better for cutting fabric, but the dagger was more intimidating, and thus the Dark Lord favored it. He turned it over in his hand, the blade catching the torchlight, and recalled those days when he had relished this moment. He would have to call upon those memories, find that need that had driven him to take without mercy, and unleash the darkness inside if he hoped to live through this night. It was already so close to the surface that it wouldn't take much.

His mind drifted as the girl was secured, back, all the way to the beginning. In a room much like this, the players had been different then, but the result would be the same. Lucius finally looked up from the table at the girl, and for a brief moment, Hermione stared back at him trembling with fear. He blinked, and she was gone, and only the muggle girl remained. She didn’t look anything like Hermione save for the brown hair, but it was hard to set the vision aside, and it shook him more than he was willing to admit. Lucius stepped forward, towering over her, her fear roiling off her in waves. He glanced down dispassionately to see she had already soiled herself. They hadn’t even begun.

“Please, you don’t have to do this!” she begged. “Please let me go. I won’t tell anyone. I swear!” She didn’t sound anything like Hermione either and somehow, it made it marginally easier. He didn't know if that was truly a good thing.

Lucius held the blade behind his back, down and out of sight as he inspected her. She was older than Hermione, but not by much, and he prayed that it was merely coincidence that the resemblance was as close as it was.

“Has anyone touched you?” He knew they wouldn’t have, not if she had been saved for him, and the small shake of her head confirmed it.

“Please…”

“Shhh,” he shushed her, until she only whimpered pitifully, tears streaming down her cheeks. “Nothing is as you think it is. I don’t plan on fucking you.”

She was ticking all the boxes for him, and Lucius could feel that old, familiar excitement building, his focus narrowing until it was only the two of them and nothing else. His fingers readjusted without conscious thought, flipping and spinning the blade held loosely within his grasp. He focused on the tremble of her lower lip, the almost inaudible whine in the back of her throat, the weak, ineffectual pull against her bonds, and a shudder of need swept through him.

A hand on his arm and a hiss close at his side broke the spell he had fallen under, and Lucius came back to himself with a sudden start. “What are you waiting for? Get on with it!”
Lucius had Bellatrix crushed against the pillar, his forearm and his blade at her throat, before he even realized it.

The girl screamed, sounding far away as his gaze slid over to take in the woman grinning maniacally despite the crimson trickle winding its way down her neck. Lucius tore his eyes away from the sight with a snarl of rage, his face inches from her own.

“Do it,” she cackled.

“Stop antagonizing him, Bella,” the Dark Lord hissed in warning.

Lucius leaned on his blade, another line of red joining the first.

“Entertain us, Lucius. Do not concern yourself with her.”

“Yes, my Lord.” Reluctantly, Lucius released Bellatrix, glancing at the dagger with a sneer of disgust, and wiped it off on the bodice of her dress. The smile never left her face as she sauntered away to rejoin the crowd.

Lucius turned back towards his victim, for now that his senses had returned, he knew he could call her nothing else. He caressed her cheek gently, stepping closer despite her pitiful sobbing and pressed his forehead to hers, shushing her once more. Bella's interruption, unwelcome though it was, did serve to make him remember what it was that he was doing, and even though he wanted desperately to comfort her, Lucius dared not under the Dark Lord’s watchful gaze.

He cut away her dirty clothes, tossing them to the side until she stood naked before him. He noticed she had a few bruises and secretly admired her for it. Clearly, she had put up a fight before being taken. Lucius knew the girl was already long dead, had been since her capture, and of the two of them, he was the only one with even a remote possibility of leaving the room alive.

He lifted the dagger and made the first shallow cut, admiring the way she didn’t cry out despite her fear. She was a pretty girl, innocent, he thought absently, and was momentarily saddened, because she didn’t deserve what he was going to do to her. He knew that once he was done with her, whatever was pulled out of some field, or ditch, or dark alley would be unrecognizable. Tonight, would be the worst night of her young life and it wouldn’t end quickly.

He felt the quickening of his pulse as the metallic tang of copper assaulted his senses and felt himself slip back into that place he had tried so hard to leave behind. A second shallow cut joined the first, and that dark part of himself that revelled in his work took over as the girl whimpered beneath his blade.

It was quite late in the evening when Severus Snape returned to his private quarters. He slipped out of his teaching robes the moment the door closed behind him, hanging the garment on its hook. Severus massaged his temples with a long sigh of relief as he undid the top button of his frock coat. The robes could wait until morning for cleaning. Right now, he intended to relax with a good book, and settled himself onto the sofa before the roaring fire to do just that.

All told, it wasn't a terrible way to end the week. Severus allowed himself to entertain the briefest of small smiles as he opened his book up to where he had last left off. Granger had done far better in her lesson than he had anticipated, answering his questions to his satisfaction and brewing a rather stunning potion, for an amateur at least. Naturally, she still had a long way to go, but he had to grudgingly accept that she was indeed turning a new leaf, as it were, when it came to her
approach. She had impressed him so much, in fact, that he had given her house points, and had even gone so far as to offer private lessons once a week, an offer she had accepted without hesitation.

On the surface, private tutoring, of any student, let alone a Gryffindor, was wildly out of character for Severus, which was perhaps why the student in question had given him an incredulous look and accepted so quickly, as if he might change his mind. It wasn't, in fact, quite as out of character as it seemed.

Those who knew him well, like Minerva, who had somehow already found out about the evening's detention and had given him a knowing look in the teacher's lounge, knew that Severus cared more about the pursuit of knowledge than anything else. If a student proved themselves worthy of his time and consideration, then Severus had no qualms about teaching them what he knew. As far as he was concerned, he was really doing himself a favor. There were far too many idiots in the world as it was. His lip quirked into a slight grimace. It was probably why his offers over the years had been so sparring. There were so few who met his exacting qualifications.

Severus realized with a start that he was actually more exhausted than he had thought. He sat up abruptly, groaning in sleepy confusion as his book tumbled off his chest to land on the floor with a dull thud. The source of his rude awakening was not immediately evident, and he looked about, attempting to locate whatever it was that had woken him.

An impatient tapping at the window proved to be the source, and Severus made his way over, fumbling with the latch until the window finally swung open and a haughty little owl landed on the sill. Without fanfare, and without waiting for him to find it a treat, it dropped its missive into his hand, and then turned and flew off into the night.

He rubbed at his eyes to clear the haze, relighting the fire that had burned low while he slept. His name, at first glance, appeared hastily scrawled across the front of the envelope, but upon closer inspection, merely appeared jagged with a level of repressed excitement. Severus’ hands began to shake ever so slightly. It had been well over a dozen years, but he recognized that handwriting.

Severus couldn't breathe as he tore open the letter and read what it said. All the air left his lungs in a rush, and he put a hand out to steady himself on the mantle.

“That fucking bitch,” he whispered aloud, unable to initially fathom what he read.

Severus’ mind was reeling from the news, but he moved with a purpose before he realized it. With little care, he dug into the shelf closest to the fireplace, sweeping books and scrolls to the floor in a flurry until he could reach the box hidden behind. He had prayed he would never need it again, but of course, he had been prepared. The letter floated to the floor, forgotten, as Severus gathered his things as quickly as possible. He would be too late to stop the proceedings, which was the point, but he could hope that he wouldn't be too late for what came after. Bellatrix, in her infinite madness, had no idea what she might have unleashed. Even if she did, there was a possibility she wouldn't care. She wasn‘t the one who had to pick up the pieces after all.
At this point, I'm not sure who is playing with fiendfyre: Lucius, Hermione, or me. Maybe it's all three of us! So, this is the last of the dark chapters for a good long while. It's also where the M/M slash first makes an appearance. I actually really like this chapter and I hint at and mention a lot of dark stuff. What happens on screen is rather mild by comparison IMO, but I wanted to throw that warning out there for anyone who might have a problem with it because the implications could be considered problematic. Lucius’ fetish is mentioned and explored a bit. His current mental state (tortured) is explored a lot. If you think I need to add a stronger warning please let me know. And as always, I love the kudos, comments, and constructive feedback. I have made several edits to this story already based on them. Enjoy!

In no fit state for an apparition, Lucius stumbled through the Floo into his study, the silver mask in his hand thumping against the carpeted floor as he landed hard on his knees, and remained there for several minutes, drawing in deep ragged breaths in the effort to try and exert some sort of control over himself. At long last he stood, his legs wobbling beneath him, taking a first, unsteady step towards the door, but thinking better of it, veered sharply in the direction of the liquor cabinet, snatching up the first bottle he came into contact with, fingers slick against the glass.

With trembling hands, Lucius began tearing at his robes, needing to rid himself of them, stripping off the dragonhide armor as he walked, until at last he stood naked in front of the mirror in his bathroom, breathing harshly. The black robes had hidden it well, but he was covered in blood: his body, his hands, his face. His gaze moved back and forth, from his bloody hand clutching the bottle tightly, to his jaw, smeared red and glistening. He was a mess. His hands were shaking, his heart pounding, and the sight in the mirror made it even worse.

Lucius leaned heavily on the marble counter-top, trying to ground himself, a miserable groan wrenched from his chest, but he couldn’t calm his raging mind, his thoughts swirling dizzily around his head. In a fit of sudden rage, his hand made contact with the nearest, heavy object, something decorative and expensive, and with bared teeth he roared, smashing it into his reflection, watching his form in the mirror splinter apart with the spider-webbing cracks. He did it again and again, wishing he could destroy the voice inside that the Dark Lord had nurtured just as easily, the one whispering to him now that one more taste couldn’t hurt.

By the time the stopper hit the marble floor, shattering on impact, he already had the decanter pressed against his lips, guzzling down the liquid blazing a fiery trail down his throat. Even through the alcohol burn he could taste it, and tore the bottle from his lips with a ragged gasp, whiskey spilling from his mouth to run down his chin. He could still taste the girl on his tongue: salt and fear and above all, that coppery tang that made want coil in the pit of his stomach. It had been so long, and he remembered the taste so well.

He swiped the back of his hand across his face, his tongue darting out involuntarily as he did so, the heady flavor stirring his cock to life once more. Lucius wanted to be disgusted at himself, disgusted that his trousers had been unbearably tented for the whole sordid episode after that first taste of her. He wasn’t. Not really. He was more disgusted that he wasn’t more disgusted, that
instead arousal thrummed through his body making everything else an afterthought.

The whiskey slipped from his fingers, shattering, and he turned away from it, stumbling into the shower with leaden steps. He leaned against the tiled wall, his head resting on his arm, felt the pounding spray wash over him, and tried not to think.

It didn’t work.

His thoughts kept returning to the girl, unable to let her go. She had been so brave for him, despite her fear, until the bitter end, when the light had faded from her eyes at last.

Lucius released a deep shuddering breath, closed his eyes to the sight of the bloody rivulets running down the wall from where his hand pressed against it, and felt sick as, though by its own accord, his hand wrapped around his cock and began to stroke roughly, but he didn’t feel sick enough to stop. His thoughts soon turned toward a different young woman, one he had not just savaged beyond all recognition, one he already had a hopeless, undeniable attraction to. And when, in his mind, Hermione took the muggle girl’s place, reeking of blood and fear, the sharp acrid taste on his tongue, he spilled over his hand and against the tile with a low moan and a quiet sob.

Lucius slid down the tiled wall, sinking to his knees, the tears streaming down his face lost in the shower spray. That old familiar feeling, the thing that had served the Dark Lord so willingly began to uncoil inside him. After so long caged and denied, it was ravenous and he didn't think he had the strength to hold it in check. He felt so lost, because he hadn’t felt so alive in years, and there was a small, growing part of him that didn't want to fight it anymore.

Severus stepped through the Floo into Lucius’ study, halting abruptly as he caught sight of the glint of silver on the floor, and the bloody hand-print beside it. He looked to the study door, standing wide open, and the beginnings of a trail of bloody clothes that lay beyond. Severus drew his wand, brandishing it before him as a precaution, a cold wave of dread rushing down his spine to settle in the pit of his stomach. The manor was far too quiet, given what he knew had transpired earlier in the evening. Severus hoped it meant that Lucius was passed out somewhere, drunk and sleeping off too much liquor in the effort to numb himself.

Near the end before the Dark Lord fell, when dealing with the torture had become too much for him, when Lucius had confessed, reluctantly, that it was tearing his soul to pieces, it had become something of a ritual. Each time the Dark Lord had finally grown tired of toying with him, Lucius had crawled back home, and drank himself into a stupor for days at a time. And each time, Severus had dutifully bundled his unconscious friend into bed, remaining near so that he wouldn’t have to wake alone. Lucius had always hated waking up alone.

He stepped gingerly around the dragonhide tunic, discarded near the study door, following the trail to Lucius’ suite. Nothing had been cleaned up yet, Severus noted with relief, and he could hear the shower running from the sitting room. If Lucius had only just arrived back home, he would have to be more cautious when handling him, but he would be much easier to handle in the long run.

Severus pushed open the half-closed door, and clutched at the frame for support to keep his knees from buckling, his breath catching in his chest at the sight that greeted him. The situation was worse than he had thought. The bathroom looked like it had been struck by a whirlwind.

Broken glass.

Bloodied footprints.
The shattered mirror.

The overwhelming scent of Ogden’s Reserve, aged twenty years at the least, hung in the air, steam filling the room from the shower.

He picked his way carefully through the glass, his wand in his hand in the event that Lucius was not in his right mind, which given the state of the room was entirely likely, and threw open the door with a flurry of movement.

“Bollocks,” Severus murmured.

He reached in to turn off the water with a grimace, confusion marring his features as he looked around.

“Sif?” he called out, but received no response. The elf was probably in France with Narcissa then.

“Cresta?” he tried instead.

“Master Severus,” came the timid reply from behind him. He spun about, finding the little creature wringing its hands nervously.

“Cresta, where is Lucius?”

“Gone.”

“He just left, then? Did he say where he was going?” Severus asked, tucking his wand away.

“Mmmm, Master left hours ago,” she replied in an anxious tone, as though reluctant to contradict him.

“Hours? Surely not. This place is a mess.” And he waved his hands about as though to indicate it.

“Yes. Cresta was a bad elf, Master Severus, so she had to punish herself, but she was scared, sir. We all was scared. Master was… not himself.”

The cold dread that had dissipated returned full force with the elf’s words. “Where, exactly, did Lucius say he was going, Cresta?”

She shook her head morosely. “Master did not say where. Master only said he was going hunting.”

The sliver of hope Severus had been clinging to shriveled up and died. Lucius’ panic-stricken voice through the Floo grate, sounding so broken and barely more than a whisper still haunted him to this day.

Severus... I need your help, Severus. Please help me.

His mind began churning, running through his options. He needed to find Lucius quickly, before he got that far, before he was too far gone to stop, and there were more than a few places he could have gone. Would he have returned to his London flat? He had used it during his last hunt a decade ago. It was familiar ground, and judging from the state of the manor, Lucius would probably be looking for the comfort of familiarity. Severus hurried back to the study, hoping he had guessed correctly so that he reached his friend in time. He never wanted to help clean up another mess like that.
The young man approached mere moments after Lucius had stepped up to the bar and ordered a drink. Clearly he had been watching him since he had entered the establishment. Of course, he had felt those eyes on him, along with many others, and had moved through the crowd with a purpose, the bass a rhythmic pounding, quickening the pace of the blood rushing in his veins.

Lucius gave the boy a covert once over in the mirror as he sidled up to him, giving him all the right signals, advertising himself as available. He might have been twenty-five, and pretty, but Lucius didn't really care about any of that. He reeked of desperation, and that Lucius did care about. He wasn't looking for the thrill of the chase tonight. Not at this point. He was in the mood to play, and the young man doing everything he could to get his attention was easy prey.

Instead of acknowledging the young man valiantly trying to be noticed, Lucius sipped at his drink, waiting for him to make the first move. He suspected he wouldn’t have to wait long. It hadn’t even been ten minutes since he had arrived.

He heard the clink as the other man’s drink landed on the bar, the sound reminding him of a trap springing closed. “You here with anyone, tonight?”

Lucius allowed a smirk to curve his lips, and glanced over at his new companion. “Did it look like I was here with anyone?”

“Well no, but bloke as handsome as you, one can’t really assume. Besides,” he said, gesturing at Lucius’ hand, “you’ve got a ring on your finger there.”

Lucius looked down, arching a brow as if the offending object had suddenly just appeared. “Yes, I suppose I do. Is that a problem…”

“Christopher,” he smiled, “And no, it’s not a problem.”

Lucius finally turned to fully face the boy, moving a half-step closer. “...Christopher.” Not Chris. A hint of a smile tugged at his lips. Hmm, interesting.

He let his fingertips wander across Christopher's hip, and hooked a finger in his belt loop, drawing him closer.

“Tell me, Christopher. What’s your poison?” Lucius asked, his voice growing just a hair’s breadth more authoritarian, a little more dominant. He was sure he knew already from the way Christopher let himself be drawn forward, pawing at him through his silk shirt, all needy, submissive, and above all, desperate, and he began to shift his persona into one he felt Christopher would respond more strongly to.

“It’s uh- it’s an Old Fashioned.”

“I wasn’t referring to the drink, but I think you knew that,” Lucius reprimanded, feeling the shiver run through the boy at his words.

He gave Lucius a flirtatious smile, continuing to play coy. “You still haven’t told me your name…”

“Lucius,” he replied a bit distractedly. A young, raven-haired woman behind Christopher catching his eye.

“Really?”

“It’s an old family name. From an old family.” Though quite beautiful, she didn't seem all that
interested or maybe she just hadn't noticed him, and Christopher was already on the hook without any real effort on his part. Perhaps he could return later and look for her, once he had finished playing with the boy. She would look absolutely stunning in red.

“So, if you're not here with anyone, are you, perhaps, looking to take someone home?” Christopher asked, drawing Lucius’ attention once more.

Lucius looked his companion up and down, blatantly checking him out as he imagined what might lay beneath Christopher’s shirt. The boy would look good in red too. Lucius imagined himself painting red trails across the boy's smooth, muscled chest, lapping it up with a low moan, and grew hard at the thought. “The right someone,” he hedged.

“Would that someone sit on your lap and call you daddy?” he asked, looking up at him with wide, innocent eyes.

Lucius barely suppressed his growl of frustration. No, he or she, most certainly wouldn’t. The right someone would beg to give him more as he tasted them. They would open a vein and do so willingly, but then, of course, that was the ideal he strove towards, something he had yet to find in all his years of searching.

He should have suspected that with the way the boy was throwing himself at him, that’s what he would want. Lucius wasn’t really in the mood to indulge the boy's inclinations, but he supposed he could deal with it to get what he wanted. Christopher was just too delicious to pass up. Besides, as soon as he was strapped down, Lucius could do whatever he wanted, and if the boy was that trusting, it would make it so much easier.

Lucius looked Christopher over one last time, and snaked an arm around him, pulling him flush against his body, an aggressive move that sealed the power dynamic between them. It let the boy know to expect a firm hand from him, something that Christopher was apparently not averse to. He couldn't quite suppress his moan as Lucius pressed him against the bar, leaning over him to snatch up Christopher's drink, their lower bodies locked together so that the boy could feel Lucius’ burgeoning erection. Lucius raised the glass to his lips, knocking back what little remained, smirking at Christopher before setting the glass back down on the bar. He grasped Christopher's chin in one hand, his thumb and fingers pressing hard into his cheeks, turning the boy's head to the side, and ghosted his lips along the line of his jaw.

“I only let naughty little boys sit on my lap and call me daddy.” He spoke directly into his ear, nibbling on his throat, just above the artery, as he ground Christopher up against the bar at his back. “Are you a naughty little boy, Christopher? Do you need to be punished? Do you need to be taught a lesson?”

His only response was an inarticulate little whine, a lust-drunken smile on his face as Lucius released him.

Without another word, Lucius paid for their drinks, in cash, not so little or so much that he would be easily recalled, and strode toward the exit, not bothering to check if Christopher was following him. Given the obvious state of the erection that had been pressed up against him, Christopher would be hot on his heels.

Not only did Christopher follow him like an obedient little puppy, he was practically draped across his lap the entire drive back. The boy had been hopelessly impressed with his Jaguar. It was an impressive vehicle, partly the reason he had chosen it for his hunt, but then he had also chosen it because it appealed to his twisted sense of humor as he'd once been told what kind of animal a jaguar was. Judging from the way Christopher's hands kept delving in between his legs, he was
even more impressed with what was in store for him, well, one of the things in store for him. He’d be too far gone to care about the other until it was too late.

Lucius dragged him from the car, his hand tight on the back of the boy's neck, as he propelled him towards the door. When they reached it, he turned him about, shoving him backwards, and he hit the door hard, hard enough to knock the breath from his lungs, the back of his head making a dull thud as he connected with it. Lucius was on him in an instant, pressing him into the wood, and snogging the boy furiously.

“What if someone sees?” he murmured breathlessly, but Lucius ignored the token protest as Christopher wrapped a leg around him to pull him closer, hands sliding around his back, and moving lower to clutch at his arse. He would have let Lucius fuck him against the bar if he had wanted. They were all but fucking against his front door now.

Lucius halted for a heartbeat, listening beyond the sound of their heavy breathing and Christopher's desperate moans. A slow, playful smirk settled onto his face, and he turned Christopher around, biting down into the juncture of his shoulder as he pulled his hips sharply back against his own. The boy cried out, rubbing his arse against Lucius' straining cock. Lucius ground against the all too willing body in front of him, inflaming the boy’s desire enough to keep him pliant. He didn’t notice when Lucius wound an arm around his neck, or when he waved a hand over the door lock. When the door swung open, he did finally notice, and it was only Lucius’ grip on him that kept him upright.

He marched him through the open door, his arm still wrapped around his neck, and peered over his shoulder with a grin.

“Hello, Severus.” The door slammed shut behind them.

When Lucius brought up the lights, Severus was sitting in the armchair facing the door, a look of extreme consternation on his face.

Lucius was using the lad as a shield, and the stupid boy was so drunk on Lucius’ charm he didn't even realize the danger of his situation. Severus didn't see Lucius’ cane anywhere, which meant he was carrying only his wand, packing light as it were.

“What are you doing, Lucius?” he asked gently, keeping his tone light and his body still, making no sudden movements.

Lucius all but growled his reply, tightening his hold on the boy possessively. “I'm enjoying myself.”

He tilted his head a fraction, one eyebrow raised. “I can see that, but I think you should let the boy go.”

Lucius glanced around suspiciously, before his gaze rested once more on Severus. “Why should I? Are you planning to fuck me, Severus? Oh no, I forgot,” he continued, not allowing Severus the chance to speak. “No, we don't do that anymore. That would be unthinkable, wouldn't it?”

“I thought you'd have a wife, not a husband,” the boy laughed.

Lucius turned his head to look at the boy.

“What the fuck are you talking about? We’re not married,” he replied, as if his companion were
incredibly stupid. Severus slowly stood and began to move closer, but Lucius wasn’t nearly as
distracted as he had hoped. When Lucius gripped the boy tighter, glaring at him once again, he
stopped.

Lucius grasped a fistful of hair, and yanked the boy’s head back, exposing his throat, and making
him wince. “He’s rather pretty isn’t he? And so eager to please. We could share him. I’m sure he’d
let you fuck him too. He seems the type.”

“You have more than that on your mind and we both know it.”

Severus watched his best friend, his only friend really, press his nose against his victim’s neck,
right over the jugular, and inhale deeply as though he could smell the blood rushing beneath the
surface. As attuned to it as he was, Severus wondered if he really could.

“Christopher doesn’t mind giving me a little taste. Do you?” His lips moved sensually up the boy’s
neck, to nibble on his ear all while his hips kept moving against the boy’s own, and all he,
Christopher, could do was moan his acquiescence and push back against Lucius wantonly. He
clearly had no idea what he was agreeing to.

Severus knew firsthand how overwhelming Lucius’ charm could be. He was like a chameleon. The
way he could read a person, adapt, give them exactly what they wanted, was a skill Lucius had
perfected. The problem was that when Lucius lost control, like now, he was single minded and
dangerous. The last time he had gone off the rails, he had been able to come to his senses and stop
himself. Eventually. Once again, Lucius’ voice whispered in his ears, begging for his help.

Lucius wasn't begging, but he needed his help now, maybe even more than he had needed it back
then, because he didn't look anywhere close to stopping and he didn't look aware enough to even
consider the possibility. He needed to get the boy away from Lucius quickly. Perhaps, a change in
tactics was in order.

“Your boy does seem eager, Lucius. You chose well.”

“Yes, I did.” He smiled, preening at the compliment.

Severus allowed his gaze to wander over Lucius’ body suggestively, what he could see of it
anyway. “I'm not really interested in him, though. You on the other hand-”

Lucius rolled his eyes dismissively. “Oh sod off, Severus. You know you aren't interested in
playing.”

He was, unfortunately, much too focused to be easily distracted by such an obvious ploy.

“Lucius…”he began, but Severus didn't know what he could say to convince him. He'd never been
in this situation before. The last time they had done this, Lucius had been a broken, sobbing wreck
on the floor when he had stepped through the Floo. Fortunately for Severus, the boy provided an
unexpected opportunity so he wouldn't have to.

“Hey, he told you to piss off. If you don't want to join in, just leave already.” He stepped forward,
all bravado and confident swagger. It was only a single step, but it was enough. Severus caught the
surprise in Lucius’ eyes, saw his fingers clutch at the boy's shirt in a vain attempt to pull him back,
but it was too late. The boy had given Severus an opening, making the mistake Lucius never would
have made, and Severus took it.

It had been ages since he had dueled Lucius, in practice only, but he remembered well how fast he
was. The split second’s hesitation when Lucius was still focused on the boy was the only opening
he had, and it made all the difference.

His wand dropped into his hand and Lucius was still in the process of drawing his own when he cast an *Impedimentia* strong enough to knock them away from each other. The boy flew forward, and Lucius flew backwards into the wall, his wand flying out of his grasp. He hit hard, falling to the floor onto his knees with a loud groan. Severus hit him with an *Incarcerous* and a *Silencio* in rapid succession, the ropes shooting up from the floor, lashing around Lucius’ body, bringing his hands in close, to cross over his chest until he couldn't move. Lastly, he secured Lucius’ fallen wand before turning back to the stunned boy, who had disbelief written clear on his face.

“What the fuck is going on?” he exclaimed in awe.

Severus pointed his wand at the boy. He backed away from him, finally concerned for his safety this evening. “You should be more careful about going home with strange men. It's a shame you won't remember the lesson. *Obliviate*,” he uttered, and shoved the young man out the door as the confusion, fear, and awe left his face, replaced by a calm serenity.

Severus stared at the door for a few moments after he had closed and locked it. He steadied himself as best he could before turning back around to confront Lucius. Any weakness he demonstrated would immediately be latched onto by his friend. He had to remain in control if he hoped to snap Lucius out of his current state.

When he turned back around, Lucius was obviously spitting mad. He was breathing hard from struggling against his bonds and glaring at him. Severus was immensely relieved that Lucius was not capable of performing a wordless, wandless killing curse, because the look he was giving him indicated that he would use it if he could.

“We're going to talk, Lucius. And you're going to come to your senses.”

No sound came out, but Severus could clearly see Lucius snarl the words ‘ *Fuck you, Severus.*’ A man in his position, on two sides of a war, learned to read lips early in order to survive or did not to his peril.

“I promised you that I wouldn't let you go back there, to become that thing you once were. I'm on your side, Lucius. I'm here to help you.”

*I don't want your help. I didn't ask for it.*

“You aren't thinking clearly right now. If you realized what you nearly did… I'm just glad I tracked you down in time.”

A man in Severus’ position learned much more than simply reading lips. The shadow that flickered across his face was so fleeting, that had Severus not known Lucius so well, he might have missed it.

“Dear Salazar, that boy isn’t the first…” Quickly averted eyes and the barest hint of a satisfied smirk before Lucius regained control of his emotions chilled Severus to the bone.

“What have you done, Lucius?” Severus asked in a horrified whisper.

Lucius’ only response was to meet Severus’ eyes and give him a slow taunting smirk. With a quietly whispered, “ *Legilimens,*” Severus slipped inside Lucius’ mind and immediately found himself reeling.

Lucius’ mind was in such turmoil, Severus couldn't even gain his bearings, not without a great deal
of effort. He was assaulted on all sides by Lucius’ thoughts and memories, most of them drenched in blood, and already Lucius was pushing him from his mind.

Severus fell to his knees, gasping, wrenched back to the real world, but not before he pulled the information he needed from the maelstrom. He reached for Lucius. There was little time to waste. From what he had seen there was a possibility, though slight and uncertain… He doubted Lucius knew of it himself.

Severus pulled the Sleeping Draught he had hoped he wouldn’t have to use from his pocket, and forced it down Lucius’ throat. He fought against him the entire time, and even as the potion began to take effect, struggled weakly against his bonds. It didn’t take long for him to go still, his breathing evening out, as he slipped into a peaceful slumber. Severus held him until he was sure Lucius was truly out, not that he doubted his own skill, and then summoned Cresta.

The elf appeared with the crack of apparition, still wringing its hands in fear.

“Take him back to the manor, Cresta. Make sure he stays bound. Under no circumstances are you to free him. Do you understand?”

She nodded with a whimper.

“If he awakens, give him another sleeping draught.” He continued. “I'll be there as soon as I can.”

He stood abruptly, knowing that Cresta would follow his orders. Lucius had decreed it himself that Severus was to be obeyed as a precaution against this exact event.

“Where are you going, Master Severus?”

“Hopefully to save what remains of Lucius’ soul,” he threw over his shoulder without a backward glance. “Just take care of him until I return.”

Severus had never claimed to understand why Lucius took such pleasure in the sight, the smell, and the taste of blood, but he could unfortunately see how it might have come about. The entire Malfoy line, Abraxas more than most, was obsessed with it. It was inevitable that at some point that obsession would take an unexpected turn, that the lectures on blood purity drilled into the heads of each subsequent generation would culminate in at least one of them conflating blood and sex together.

If Abraxas had been more understanding, had helped Lucius work through it rather than beat him bloody and expressly forbid it, the Dark Lord would never have been able to sink his claws into Lucius the way he did. Not for the first time in their incredibly long history did Severus curse the Dark Lord for twisting Lucius into this unhinged monster. Even more, he cursed Abraxas. It was his heavy handed rejection of Lucius that had made it so easy for the Dark Lord in the first place.
By the time Severus set foot in Lucius’ bedroom suite again, dawn was painting the sky with its pastel brushstrokes. He thought he’d been exhausted before. Now he felt dead on his feet.

He checked on Lucius, still bound and unconscious sleeping peacefully in bed. Cresta had been forced to give him another vial. It would be hours before he woke again; hours before he would have to deal with Lucius. Hopefully by then the episode would pass and Lucius would be rational enough.

Severus took a quick shower to wash off the dirt he picked up from kneeling in that field for hours, as well as all the blood he’d gotten all over himself from the young woman he’d found there while trying to care for her. He rummaged around in Lucius’ wardrobe, finding a pair of sleeping pants that fit well enough once he’d lengthened them a good three inches. The sun was even higher in the sky, threatening to crest the horizon. He wouldn't get much rest with the sky so bright. Each of the drapes on the floor to ceiling windows snapped closed with the flick of his wand, mercifully blacking out the room until it was as dark as the dungeons he normally slept in.

Severus shoved his wand beneath the pillow, keeping it within reach. He would sleep, just for a few much needed hours, and then he would untie Lucius. Deal with him then. Severus collapsed face-down on the bed and was asleep shortly after his head hit the pillow.

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Lucius lengthened his stride, hurrying to keep up with the man in front of him. Though he was on pace to one day tower over his father, he wasn't there yet. He would never be as stocky his father, though. No, he would take after his mother, who had been tall and elegant as he would be. Lucius often wished that she were still here. He wouldn't have to suffer his father's cruel hand if he had been the one who had died. She wouldn't have been pledging his service to strange, dark wizards if she had been the one who had lived.

Even though he was practically running after his father, he did an admirable job of maintaining his well cultivated Malfoy sneer and haughty demeanor, his head tilted back just so, seemingly immune to the effects of their quickened pace, despite the ache in his freshly healed side. Once they arrived back home he would be critiqued on his performance, critiqued and found wanting, as always. He had long ago come to terms with being an utter disappointment to his father. Now he merely did his best to avoid incurring his wrath through a combination of obeying his father’s
draconian rules when it suited him and subterfuge when it didn’t.

His father led him through the ancient house to the room and wizard he had met only once before, a week ago when he had taken that wizard's mark. He hadn't expected to be back so soon, but his presence had been requested, according to his father, and apparently he had no choice but to go.

Lord Voldemort.

Lucius didn't know much about him, but his father said he was powerful. He said that only Lord Voldemort could restore pure-blood supremacy and put ‘those disgusting mudbloods in their place.’ Lucius didn't argue against his father's ranting, only nodded and tuned out the rare praise of someone who was not Abraxas Malfoy. He certainly didn't mention that he routinely slept with muggleborns, one of them only hours after being marked, or that he would glamour himself and venture out into muggle London on occasion. Lucius actually rather liked the muggles, they tended to be more adventurous in the bedroom, but he knew better than to sing their praises aloud. He was not stupid enough to speak such blasphemy in his father's presence.

His father knelt at the dark wizard's feet, bowing low with a reverent ‘My Lord.’ Lucius echoed his father's actions, but his voice carried more apprehension than reverence. From what he understood, it was highly unusual to be summoned so soon after being first marked. No one else his age had been.

He felt Lord Voldemort touch the top of his bowed head. His fingers traveled down his cheek, like a lover's might, to cup his chin and tilt his face upwards. Lucius took in the reptilian features, meeting Lord Voldemort's red eyes, and then it felt like his head was being suddenly split in two, and it felt like Lord Voldemort was burrowing inside his soul.

Lucius grit his teeth against the pain. He had never felt anything like it. His father's beatings didn't hurt as much. The first time he had allowed another man to breach him hadn't hurt as much. That had at least turned pleasurable. Voldemort's assault was nothing but agony. Then Voldemort's voice was in his head, and it took everything he had in him not to scream out loud.

Lucius Malfoy, I see your heart. I see your deepest desires. I see everything.

And he truly felt laid bare before this dark wizard.

Abraxas tells me that you are weak.

Lucius knew he was. He knew what his father thought of him. He hadn't thought he would tell anyone else.

He is wrong.

A sidelong glance at his father revealed no reaction to this declaration. He couldn't hear what Lord Voldemort was saying to him.

You possess a strength he does not, and you will serve me as no one has before.


Serve me and you shall be rewarded.

He felt the hilt of a blade in his hand and had to look down to prove to himself it wasn't real. And then Lord Voldemort burrowed in deeper. In his effort to keep from screaming himself hoarse, he
bit down into his tongue, and the pain kept him grounded.

*Blood is life. Blood is power. There is nothing wrong with it. He was wrong to keep it from you.*

His mouth filled with the taste, and he swallowed it down, shivering in ecstasy.

*Pledge yourself to me, Lucius Malfoy, and I shall give you what you crave.*

The knife in his vision was so sharp, and the red rivulets left in its wake were so vibrant. In the vision, he slid his blade through flesh, and it cut, smooth like butter until it caught on bone. His hands were red, sticky from his play, and as he licked a trail, up and across delicate ribs, and down to drink from where the crimson ambrosia pooled in the hollow just below the sternum, he looked up and met his father's eyes. He stood out from the crowd, and his eyes were shining with approval at long last.

His head was still swimming with the visions Lord Voldemort had shown him when he looked back up and met those red eyes once more.

“My Lord,” Lucius whispered reverently, “I am yours.”

Voldemort smiled down at Lucius and the agony in his head vanished. He turned his head to the side, and already there was the merest hint of the approval he so desperately craved in his father’s eyes.

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Lucius slowly became aware of his surroundings long before he opened his eyes. He was in his bed, but not alone. There was the distinct sound of a page curling as it was turned right next to his ear. It was not a new book either. It sounded well-aged, the page turning with more of a whisper than a snap; probably from his library. He was resting half on top of a warm, solid object that rose and fell gently beneath his cheek, and when he finally opened his eyes, Severus’ ribs expanded and contracted with every breath in his field of view.

A strong, comforting hand smoothed across his back, and stopped to rest on his shoulder, squeezing, as if to say the owner of that hand knew he was awake, and that he was there when needed. That seemed important somehow, but he couldn't really remember why. Lucius assumed he must have taken something, because he didn't feel like he did when he drank too much. He was having a lot of trouble concentrating, remembering why Severus was in bed with him in the first place. His head felt numb inside, disconnected, his thoughts just out of reach, and his mouth was terribly dry. Severus turned another page, and Lucius blinked slowly, staring without seeing at the fine trail of dark hair disappearing into Severus' sleeping pants. His eyes drifted closed slowly, and Lucius began to doze again, lulled by the rhythmic sounds of Severus turning the pages of his book, and his heart beating beneath his ear.

Lucius didn't know how long he dozed, but at last he began to sit up slowly, driven by needs he could no longer ignore. He needed water to clear the cotton from his mouth, and the pressure on his bladder was quickly growing unbearable. A sudden flash, a memory of broken glass on marble tile, and Lucius sat bolt upright, pushing away from Severus like he had been burnt, as a flood of memories threatened to overwhelm him.

“Lucius?” Severus reached out, attempting to pull him back in close and calm him.

“No!” He batted Severus away frantically, scrambling backwards. “Don't fucking touch me...”

His breathing quickly grew erratic as he finally began to remember the previous night. “Oh Merlin
“Don’t think about it. Not yet,” Severus whispered, his arms finally wrapping around him.

He couldn’t stop thinking about it, about eyes staring back at him, about the fear reflected therein. Lucius tucked his face into the crook of Severus’ neck, his arms winding about Severus’ waist, clinging desperately as his horror rapidly gave way, and that dark urge began to overtake him once more. His chest heaved with his broken sobbing and Severus just held him until there was nothing more than quiet sniffing.

“There's nothing to be done now. Take this.” Severus held up a small vial for him.

Lucius shook his head and tried to pull away again. “No, I can't… I-

“You're not ready to deal with this yet. Take it. We'll face this later,” Severus replied, refusing to let him go.

“No,” he mumbled, his words muffled against Severus’ neck, “I mean I need to… relieve myself.”

“Oh. Yes, of course,” Severus nodded stiffly, releasing him. Lucius glanced apprehensively toward the bathroom, but made no move get up.

Severus followed the direction of his gaze. “It's been cleaned.” Lucius nodded solemnly, leaving Severus sitting on the bed, and made his way to the bathroom, pausing on the threshold and taking a deep breath.

It was pristine, just as Severus had said, but when he closed his eyes, he could still see the destruction he had caused, and even worse, he could still feel the way he had felt then. Lucius finished his business quickly, and didn't dare look at his reflection in the mirror, not keen to know what the smooth surface reflected back at him.

Severus was back to his book when Lucius returned, leaning against the headboard as though nothing had happened. He was pointedly ignored as he picked the vial up off the nightstand. The liquid inside was familiar, a version of a Sleeping Draught that Severus had developed for him after the last time. It would help him rest, but more importantly, it would aid in calming his disquieted mind, and hopefully return him to some semblance of normalcy. He swallowed it down, then climbed back beneath the sheets, and curled up against Severus’ side. That strong, comforting hand returned, holding him close.

“You're staying though?” His eyelids were already beginning to flutter from the effect of Severus’ potion, but he forced himself to stay awake until he had an answer.

Fingers threaded through his hair, curling on the back of his neck. “I'll be here when you wake up.”

Severus was true to his word. When Lucius woke, he was met by Severus’ comforting presence and another vial. He took it without complaint.

When he woke again, a hand on his wrist was shoving his arm unceremoniously aside as an annoyed grumble came from the chest pressed against his ear. “I forgot how bloody handsy you are when you're drugged up.”

He snorted at Severus’ tone.

“Oh, that's amusing, is it? I've only had to peel you off my prick a half dozen times.” Lucius
blinked opened his eyes and looked up. Severus was glaring down at him, but then his lip twitched in that way that was uniquely Severus, to contain the small smile that threatened to make itself known.

Lucius swallowed hard, unable to return the smile, and sat up to face his dearest friend. It took a while to gather his thoughts. Severus sat up too, resting his back against the headboard once again, waiting patiently as though realizing Lucius was ready to talk.

“I can’t do it, Severus. I can’t go through it again. I can’t be what he wants me to be.”

“Do you remember what happened?” he asked gently.

Lucius nodded slowly. “Not everything... but I remember too much.”

“Excluding the Dark Lord’s... gift, how many were there?” Lucius paled, the color draining from his face as he shut his eyes tight and looked away quickly. “How many more were there, Lucius?”

He shook his head and whispered, “I don't remember.”

“You do remember,” Severus insisted. “You just don’t want to because that would make it real. I’m only trying to help. You can't run from this, Lucius.”

“Can't I?” Severus didn't answer. Lucius knew what he would say anyway. He wouldn't meet Severus’ eyes, picking at the hem on his pants.

“One.”

Then almost as an afterthought, “Nearly two. Her friend stopped her.” Which was why he had widened his net.

“And then just that boy, but you stopped me before...”

He turned accusatory eyes on Severus. “Why weren’t you there, Severus? You promised...”

Severus shook his head. “I wasn’t told until it was too late. I’m sure it's because I would have tried to stop it.”

“And what did I do, exactly, to make him doubt me? You spoke with him... He- Why?” Lucius kept playing the past few months over in his head, trying to find where he had gone wrong enough to rouse suspicion.

“Bellatrix bent his ear. You know the influence she has.”

He hadn’t been thinking clearly once the girl had been brought before him, but that certainly explained her behavior. Lucius wished fervently that he not managed to stay his blade. He wouldn't have mourned her loss.

“You’ll not be tested again in such a way.”

Lucius’ head snapped up at that. “Truly?” he asked, half in disbelief.

Severus spoke slowly, choosing his words with care. “I have already spoken with our lord, and I have impressed upon him the danger in allowing you such indulgences, given your inclination towards the extreme. I have warned him against pushing you in such a way.”

Lucius knew what the Dark Lord would read into that. On the one hand, it relieved him that he
would no longer be required to perform for his amusement, but on the other it was dangerous territory for Severus to insinuate that he was a liability, no matter how he might have actually phrased it. The way Severus bent the Dark Lord's ear was nearly as bad as the way Bella did, and not for the first time did he wonder if his friend was truly on his side.

“There is one more thing you should know,” Severus added. “You said that there was a… another victim, aside from the Dark Lord's test.”

Lucius nodded morosely.

“You weren't quite as thorough as you believed.”

“But that's- Are you certain?” and there was a tremor of hope in Lucius’ voice.

Severus inclined his head in acknowledgement. “I pulled her location from your mind. The state you were in, it wasn't an easy feat. After I found her, I spent several hours healing the damage, but yes, she'll live.”

Lucius sat in stunned silence as Severus finished. If he thought about it, he could vaguely recall his frustration with how quickly he had thought she had expired. It had angered him enough then to get rid of her quickly and move on.

“I don't know how to thank you, Severus,” he whispered, pausing long enough to wet his lips. “What do you want? I could-”

“No, you’re not paying me to keep a promise I made to you.” Severus snapped in exasperation.

“Okay,” Lucius mumbled, his head bowed slightly. He didn't understand. Severus was a Slytherin just like him. He had to want something. It wasn't like he was a Gryffi- Lucius shut that train of thought down quickly. He didn't know if Severus was listening in, and the last thing he needed was Severus finding out about her.

“That was harsher than I meant it to be.” Severus massaged his temples, sighing with irritation behind his hand. “I'm just exhausted, Lucius. You can thank me by trying to stay out of trouble. And maybe take a shower. Eat something. Shall I have the elves prepare...” he glanced at the clock, “...dinner?”

He waited for Lucius to reply, but then continued in answer to the unspoken question in Lucius’ eyes. “I'm not leaving. I just thought you might want to freshen up.”

Lucius didn't want to be alone, to give his mind a chance for his thoughts to wander, but he couldn't deny the appeal in cleansing himself; both physically and symbolically. And it wasn't like he would truly be alone. Severus would be close by.

“Okay,” he agreed.

“Well go on then.” Severus gestured towards the en suite bathroom. “Take as long as you need. We'll eat when you've finished.”

As it turned out, a moment to himself and time to analyze his thoughts was exactly what he needed, something he would never dream of doing with Severus in the room. This time when Lucius entered the bathroom he didn’t allow himself to think about how he had felt when he had torn through the room the previous night. He did what he was good at instead, and pushed it from his mind, ignoring it.
What he couldn’t ignore was the simple fact that he couldn’t trust himself to not lose control. He’d already been so close to it before, when Hermione’s fear of him had been real. If he saw that look in her eyes now, he wouldn’t be able to stop himself from hurting her. There was absolutely no way he could tell her now, not unless he wanted to tell her everything, and he wasn’t doing that. He would just have to bury it down deep, lock that part of himself away, and never go there again. And when she inevitably asked? Lucius had no idea what he was going to do.

The water beat down, scalding on his shoulders and back as Lucius considered what he was going to do about Hermione’s impending visit. She clearly trusted him, and the Dark Lord might have ruined that trust with Bellatrix’s counsel, and it wouldn’t even have been planned, because apparently he still didn’t suspect that he was working with her.

She would be suspicious if he refused to touch her after their last meeting, but he couldn't let her find out his secret either. If the Dark Lord was dead, that was one thing, but with so much riding on their partnership… No, it was best to keep it to himself. He could do it. He'd already locked it away for years before.

When he emerged from the bathroom, his towel pulled tight around his hips, his skin was still wet and reddened from the water’s heat. The wide open doors to the balcony allowed a gentle breeze in to cool his overheated skin. A fresh pair of silk lounge pants and dressing gown were laid out for him, and Lucius dressed unhurriedly, belting the gown loosely about his waist.

When he emerged onto the balcony, the tattered remnants of his facade were back in place and all thoughts of Hermione were pushed firmly from his mind. If Severus breached his mind again, he would find nothing of interest.

Severus sat at the small table, pouring two cups of tea, and surrounded by his elven dinner staff waiting to serve them. Lucius accepted the offered cup as he took his seat.

“You should wear color more often, Severus. It suits you,” he said, indicating the spare dressing gown Severus had chosen.

Severus gave him a sidelong look, a hint of suspicion in his eyes. “Don't worry. I'm not propositioning you. I know we don't do that anymore. There's no harm in improving your wardrobe though. Besides, you're not nearly drunk enough for that.”

When Severus rolled his eyes dramatically in annoyance at him, Lucius almost felt like himself, despite his sense of dread hovering in the background.
Happy Halloween! Here's a nice long chapter for you! More feels! More smut! More problematic stuff! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Professor Snape is in a frightful mood.

That seemed to be the consensus among the student body on Monday. And Tuesday. She didn’t hear any of those complaints Wednesday, but by the time Friday rolled around, his foul mood had apparently returned full force. When she had left after their lesson a week prior, he had seemed, well happy was a strong word for Professor Snape, but he had at least seemed content. That wasn’t the case during class this week. He had snapped at just about everyone, flinging detentions left and right along with his cutting words, and even Crabbe and Goyle had been wise enough to keep their heads down and their mouths shut. She had no idea what might have caused the change. No one had seen him on school grounds all weekend, not until early Monday morning, and there had been dark circles under his eyes indicating a severe lack of sleep. Where had he been all weekend, and what had he been doing to put him in such a foul mood?

She had no answers to that question. Now Hermione was sitting in the Potions classroom, waiting for him to arrive, and she still wasn’t sure if it was a real detention or a pretend one. Even she had not managed to escape his wrath, and her minor infraction had been enough to land her here. The door flew open, clanging noisily against the stone wall as Professor Snape stormed into the classroom, making a beeline for the storeroom. She could hear him rummaging around, gathering things, as she waited quietly to find out her fate.

When he emerged, his arms laden with various ingredients, he stopped short at the sight of her, nearly losing several jars in the process.

“Oh. Right,” he stated, clearly just remembering that she was meant to be there, and then stared at her, unblinking, his head tilted slightly in thought, a frown furrowing his brow.

“I can come back another time, Professor,” Hermione murmured, reaching for her bag.

“No,” he replied succinctly, coming to a sudden decision. “No, you can assist me. Perhaps I’ll actually finish at a decent time.” And then he proceeded to curse Peeves under his breath though she didn't quite catch what for as he carefully, yet quickly, laid out his items on the stained table.

“What are you waiting for?” he snapped, looking up to find her still perched on her stool. “Bring three cauldrons over. Standard sized two. Copper. And make sure they’re clean,” he barked out, waving in the direction of the storage shelves.

She scrambled to follow his orders before he decided to turn the impromptu lesson into an actual detention. Hermione watched him arrange the jars and vials, inspect the quality of the ingredients, and nod to himself absent in satisfaction.

“What are we brewing?”

“Professor,” she gently broached, “what are we brewing?”
“Have you no idea?” His cutting question was a short, caustic huff daring her to be so foolish as to not hazard a single guess. He lit two fires, but didn't place the cauldrons just yet, which made sense. If he was using copper, he was looking to shorten the brewing time considerably. The fire would have to be hot first and he would have to time everything down to the second in order to get it right.

“At first glance, it looks like a Sleeping Draught, but I've brewed one before-”

“Of course, you have,” he interjected as he continued working, speaking more to himself than her.

“And these extra ingredients…,” she continued. “What are we doing?”

He sighed deeply, rubbing at his eyes, and then paused as though seeming to search for a suitable explanation. “I'm sure you're bright enough to know by now there are times when a person may be called upon to do something, perform a task perhaps, that is incompatible with their nature. Would you imagine that completing such a task would be difficult?”

She nodded. Difficult if not impossible.

Professor Snape nodded in return. “As time goes on and they are called to do it more often they might become numb to the task. They might close off the part of themselves that hated it in order to cope with the demand.”

A reasonable assumption.

“And it might work for a time, but then what do you think would happen when that person could no longer close their eyes to what they were doing? What would happen when they were pushed too far?”

Hermione imagined the kind of situation Professor Snape spoke of and glanced down at the table again. The answer seemed obvious. “You're referring to madness, Professor?”

He stoked the flame, and seated himself across from her, leaning on the table to speak in that rare, intimate way of his that sounded almost like a conspiratorial whisper. “I suppose you could call it that; madness of a sort. A Sleeping Draught is generally considered an ineffective treatment for such a malady. Tell me, Miss Granger, why that might be so.”

“Well it doesn't do anything except put a person to sleep. When they wake up, nothing has changed really. They could be better, but they just as likely might not. Therefore it wouldn't actually be considered a treatment at all.”

His eyebrow quirked slightly in what appeared to be approval. “Correct. This,” he said, indicating the jars littering the tabletop, “is a potion of my own devising. The base is a Sleeping Draught which is why you recognize it. Can you guess what the next layer is?”

“Draught of Peace.” She could easily see it now. And the third layer… “But Wiggenweld, Professor? Yes, Wiggenweld is a healing potion, but it's known to awaken a person from magical sleep. That seems counterintuitive.”

“Hence the addition of one final ingredient.” He drew a small vial of a dark red liquid from his pocket and set it down. “It acts as a binding agent for the top two layers allowing the whole to work together as intended.”

“Blood magic,” she replied in awe. “I didn't think it was possible in a potion. Not even a layered one. Not like this at least.”
He nodded solemnly, playing with the vial, spinning it in slow circles on the tabletop. “It’s highly experimental. Not an easy feat to make it this far.”

“So this would help people like Neville's parents. Is this meant to help them?” she asked excitedly. Neville would be beside himself to have his parents back.

“Yes and no. Unfortunately for Frank and Alice Longbottom, they were tortured by Bellatrix Lestrange, and there isn't much left of who they were. They are beyond the scope of what this potion is currently capable of. I do hope to one day perfect it, but as of now, the formula remains stubbornly specific and exceptionally difficult to brew correctly. The batch we brew tonight will work on only one individual, and depending on how judiciously it is used, may last no longer than a few weeks. A month at most.”

No wonder he was trying to refine it. The work hours required for brewing potions tailored to individuals would be astronomical, and for an entire batch of what amounted to three full brews to be gone so quickly.

“When did you devise this formula?”

“I began work on it shortly after the Dark Lord's disappearance. This iteration was finished approximately ten years ago.”

“And you've been brewing it all this time?”

“No, I've only been attempting to perfect it, without much success. There hasn't been a need for it in a long time.”

A sudden need for such a potion so shortly after Professor Snape's obviously terrible weekend was highly suspicious to her. What exactly had Professor Snape been doing all weekend?

Hermione glanced down at the vial in his hands again. “Whose blood is it, Professor?”

“It's of no consequence.” His tone was meant to be a warning, clipped as it was.

“Professor…” She had always been too curious for her own good.

“It's someone who needs it, Miss Granger. More than that, I'm not willing to disclose. If your Gryffindor sensibilities won't allow you to accept that, you are free to take your leave.” Professor Snape paused, holding her gaze in challenge. She didn't move.

Hermione watched closely as Professor Snape began. He was offering to teach her something she hadn't even thought was possible. Though she had her suspicions, it didn't really matter who the potion was for. Clearly it was someone who found the darkness in their soul overwhelming. That sounded like it could have been Professor Snape, but it could just as easily have been someone else. The important thing was that it didn't sound like Voldemort, and as long as she wasn't helping him, she was okay with it.

As much as he appreciated the potion's effects, Lucius had known he couldn't rely on it for long. He couldn't have Severus dropping by with a fresh supply while Hermione was at the manor. Lucius may have cared for the man, and he obviously relied on him, but Severus couldn't be trusted with that much information. And with Hermione there, he couldn't be seen suddenly imbibing a mysterious new potion. That would lead to far too many questions he had no intention of answering. So, with no small amount of effort, Lucius weaned himself off of it as quickly as he
The first few days after Severus had left had been rough, and when he woke with a start in the middle of the night tangled in his sheets, the thoughts crowding inside his head only served to reinforce his certainty that he should forget that part of himself ever existed. A week on, and he was finally sleeping unaided through the night again. The nightmares weren't gone, not by any means, but they were manageable. They were manageable enough that when Severus brought him a freshly brewed batch, he had done an admirable job of convincing him that he was well on his way to recovery. It was such a convincing performance that he was half convinced himself.

And now, like an idiot, he was tempting fate once more. Lucius told himself he shouldn't be doing this, and wrapped his cloak tighter against the frigid, salty wind. After his performance, he was finally back in the Dark Lord’s good graces. Even on the best days, that position was rather tenuous. So, when he had received word from one of his associates at last, the decision hadn't been an easy one.

He told himself again that he should just abandon his quest and cut his losses, that it would be safer to do so. The thought of finally being free of the Dark Lord after so long drove him onward. Beholden to a madman and then his father before, Lucius had never truly been free. He wondered what it was like to do as he pleased without looking over his shoulder and worrying about what might happen if he said or did the wrong thing. He wondered, but having never known it, he couldn't really imagine it.

“Not much farther now, sir.” He bloody well hoped not. They had been walking nearly an hour, and though their muggle torches, Lucius forgot what they were actually called, shed enough light to see, the cold was numbing, making him hopelessly sluggish. Lucius lost his footing, cursing as he slipped on the treacherous terrain in the dark. His companion picked his way nimbly over the jagged ground, finding footholds with ease and suddenly came to a stop, motioning for Lucius to do the same.

The man standing at his shoulder shivered in his customary way and not from the cold, unforgiving weather. When Lucius looked up at the cliffside and the gaping maw that seemed impossibly darker, an involuntary shiver ran down his own spine. At long last, his shady associate had finally come through. At long last, they were at the halfway point, and even farther along if Hermione was successful on her end.

“I'm afraid we'll have to swim from here, sir.” Now he understood why he had been warned not to wear his customary layers. The sea would have dragged him down in an instant.

His companion took a step.

“What of the torches?”

The man looked back at him and replied, “They're waterproof.” He clenched it between his teeth and then dove into the water.

Lucius stepped out into the water, mimicking his companion, anticipation and apprehension coursing through his veins in equal measure, and began to swim towards the darkness in the cliff face.

By the time they reached the passage in the cliffside, light bouncing off the shimmering surface of the walls, Lucius could barely feel his limbs. And when he stepped up out of the water, he missed the step the first time. His companion reached down, offering a hand, and Lucius took it gratefully.
To say that Lucius was paranoid following the unexpected test of his loyalty would be an understatement. His teeth chattered with the cold, the air in the cave nearly as chilled as the water. He pulled a Pepperup potion from his pocket as the other man did from his own, his fingers fumbling with the stopper for a moment, before he managed it, warming in moments after downing the contents.

Lucius had flat-out refused to use his magic in this place. Until absolutely necessary, he would refrain. There was no telling how often the Dark Lord visited these places and if he could somehow sense Lucius’ use of magic through his mark… He had only just avoided the Dark Lord’s wrath. He wouldn’t take the chance unnecessarily.

“There doesn’t seem to be anything here, sir.” His associate looked around worriedly, thinking that perhaps he had failed again, shining the torch into the darker recesses of the cave. It wasn’t large though, so his efforts were for naught. Lucius thought the other man should at least be able to feel the magic radiating from the walls in this place even if he was a squib. After all, it called to him, nearly overwhelming all rational thought. It called from one place in particular more strongly than anywhere else in the cave.

Lucius made his way over to it, distantly aware of the other man trailing after him, and allowed his hand to hover over the rocky surface, searching for the correct spot. His hand stilled, an almost imperceptible nod, and he was reaching into his inner pocket. Lucius would have been more surprised if the Dark Lord hadn't used blood magic. The blade he withdrew was small, not really even a proper dagger, but it only had once purpose to perform. He handed it over, hilt first, and the other man took it with shaking hands.

“Sir, I don’t understand.” He looked at the blade like it was a snake prepared to strike him.

“The way through is hidden here. It responds only to one thing. Blood.”

He looked green as he stammered out. “What- what do you-”

“Oh, for Merlin’s sake;” Lucius hissed. “I need your blood to open the passage. I won’t risk using mine for the same reason I haven’t used any magic. I won’t risk alerting You-Know-Who before we’ve finished our work.”

At the mere mention he paled, eyes going wide in terror. “He’s back?” he breathed fearfully. “But the papers…”

“Well, how else do you expect the ministry to avoid inciting mass hysteria?” Lucius tossed back like it was the most obvious thing in the world.

“I didn’t sign on for that! You said you were looking for a cursed object! I want nothing to do with You-Know-Who!” He took a step back, but there was nowhere for him to run.

Lucius narrowed his eyes dangerously.

“It’s too late for that, and it's too late to go back. I could make you do it. I could take the chance. Or you can do it of your own free will and make an obscene amount of money in the process; enough to flee the country and avoid his wrath if you desire. It’s your choice, but I will get through one way or another.” And Lucius brandished his cane threateningly. He was far too close to be thwarted now.

He watched the man quiver as he raised the blade slowly and drew it across his palm.

“Now what?” he asked quietly.
Lucius indicated the correct section of wall. “Place your hand there. Feed it.” Lucius’ tone brooked no argument, and so the man did as he was instructed. Moments later, a gap appeared in the wall, a passage leading away from the main entrance. Lucius pushed the man through, following close on his heels.

When they emerged into another cavern, far larger than he had expected, his heart began to hammer inside his chest. Even their muggle torches, which had performed admirably until now, had trouble piercing the darkness in this place, skittering off the surface of the black water. Fortunately, there was little question of where they were meant to go to find what they sought.

“Don’t touch anything,” he warned. The deeper they went, the more danger they were in. Fortunately, his companion didn't seem inclined to engage in such foolishness.

Lucius glanced at the still water and what was clearly an island in the center of the cavern. The feeling of being watched was palpable in this place. He walked down to the edge of the water pacing along the bank. He knew what he needed to do. But how was the question.

Lucius continued pacing, careful to keep his boots well away from the water that lapped against the shore, and he was rapidly losing his patience as he gradually came to the realization of what it was he was required to do. It was too soon to use his wand, and yet he knew without doubt that he had to. Lucius looked down at his left forearm, and with a tremble in his hand, drew his wand.

There was no pain in his arm to indicate that the Dark Lord knew. Nothing felt different. Lucius still waited a full five minutes after the small boat rose from the depths, certain that he was on his way, alerted by the cavern’s defenses.

Finally he moved toward the boat and carefully stepped inside. He motioned for the other man to join him, giving him a pointed look until he did so. The man was possibly even more careful than he was climbing in.

Once they were both settled, the small craft took off immediately, heading for the island. Lucius glanced down into the water with a scowl and raised eyebrow, certain something had just moved. He didn’t mention it to his companion.

At length, they arrived at the island and they each got out of the boat with the same care in which they had entered it. Lucius held his hand up, indicating that his companion should remain still. He inspected his surroundings, slowly making his way toward the center of the island, toward the pillar illuminated in ethereal light.

He looked the pillar and the basin on top filled with some kind of fluid over carefully, took in the utter lack of anything else in their immediate surroundings, and sighed. Lucius knew, or at least suspected, what kind of enchantments protected the prize inside. And even though he couldn't see it, it was definitely in there; calling to him. Lucius knew better than to fall for its siren song.

He called his companion over, conjured up a goblet, filled it with whatever was in the bowl, and handed it over.

The man looked at it with apprehension. “Sir?”

“Drink it,” he ordered. The man continued to hesitate, shaking his head slightly. “Do it and you may request anything in my power to give.” That got his attention, piquing Lucius’ curiosity about what the man might request.

With shaking hands, he lifted the vessel to his lips, gulping down the fluid with a grimace. Lucius
took it back as the man fell to his knees like a puppet with his strings cut, and refilled it. "No-please…” He was reacting much more quickly than Lucius had anticipated, and he was immensely glad that he had not entered the cavern by himself.

He held the goblet to the man's lips, and he fought him, screaming bloody murder and trying to push him away. Lucius forced the liquid down his throat anyway. He did it over and over and the man grew more reticent, more belligerent each time, begging, pleading brokenly for him to stop.

He didn’t.

He couldn't.

Not now.

Not until the bowl was empty did he toss the goblet down at his feet and reach inside to grasp his prize.

He plucked it reverently from its resting place, the light catching the facets of the crystal, ignoring the man’s pitiful moans at his feet as the play of light mesmerized him.

Finally, he thought to himself. After so many years of searching, his patience had finally paid off.

He was so focused on the bauble in his hand, that he nearly missed his companion’s reckless rush for the water’s edge. In the end, it was only the flash of movement that caught his eye.

Lucius panicked.

He drew his wand on instinct.

The words flew from his lips before he had even realized he had uttered them.

Green light enveloped the other man, and he fell to the ground dead, only inches from touching the water.

Lucius’ heart pounded in his chest and he began to panic as he peered down at the man, dead by his hand. He looked around the dark cavern fearfully, realizing what he’d just done, and shoved the locket into his pocket before scrambling madly for the boat. If the Dark Lord could sense anything in this place, he would have sensed that, and if he had, Lucius didn’t have much time. He willed the boat to move faster but it stubbornly plodded along. When it reached the shore, he made a mad dash for the entrance to the cave. He was knee deep in the frigid water when he apparated away to the safety of Malfoy manor, a sick feeling in his stomach, hoping desperately that the Dark Lord wasn't following him.

Giving her room one last once-over to ensure she had everything, Hermione clicked the latch closed on her newly charmed, extended trunk. It was a spell she had only recently perfected during her nighttime explorations to the library, but it was a spell she was absolutely thrilled with. It had taken three trips, but at last the Room of Requirement had gifted her with a completely ordinary trunk to practice her spell work on.

Now she just needed to find a small bag the next time she was in Hogsmeade that she could add the charm to as well. It would be much more convenient than carrying around a giant satchel all the time, well, maybe not to her classes since the spell was actually illegal for her to be performing, and Professors Snape and Mcgonagall would absolutely have an issue with that, but elsewhere
certainly.

Having said goodbye to her parents already, there was nothing left to do but pick up the portkey and go. She’d spent so much time at the Burrow with Harry and Ron over the years that her parents didn’t even question the excuse. In a few minutes, once again, no one would even know where she was. Hermione thought she probably should have been more concerned by that thought than she was.

She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, watching her reflection nervously smooth out the nonexistent wrinkles in her floral dress. She looked like she was getting ready for a family dinner, and not preparing to meet up with a wizard old enough to be her father.

She was immeasurably glad that he didn’t treat her in a fatherly manner, otherwise she might have found their relationship a touch disturbing. She had read nearly all of the articles in Lavender’s magazine stash, and there had been many things that hadn’t made it onto her list. She had given it some thought, but there was already such a disparity between them that it introduced an element of perverseness that she wasn’t keen to explore. It probably didn’t help that her knowing Draco made that feeling more real.

The lacy lingerie she wore was certainly more congruent with her plans than the bright yellow dress it lay beneath. The set had been an impulse purchase at Dervish & Banges; perhaps the tamest of all the items available in the reserve section, because their only magical property was that they changed colors. She had vacillated between several different choices before finally deciding on a pretty peach that would go well with her dress. Lucius hadn’t been exaggerating in his warning and she thought that might be what she was really nervous about, because she certainly wasn’t nervous about jumping into his bed again. In fact, she was already aroused, excited by the thought of what this holiday break would hold for her.

There was a notebook stuffed in her trunk, outlining most of her fantasies; some in great detail, others less so. Some of them had shocked her when she had written them down. Now she was, well not concerned exactly, but a little anxious to discover the truth about what that notebook revealed. Her purchases at Dervish & Banges had amounted to far fewer than she’d expected when she had realized that most of the implements just didn’t appeal to her. No, she had other ideas and she just hoped that Lucius would still agree to accommodate them.

Hermione plucked the small, ornate chess piece off her nightstand and took a deep breath. When she had examined it more closely in her dormitory later on, she had realized it was much more detailed than her cursory inspection revealed; probably so that it wouldn’t easily be mixed up with any normal chess sets. It had clearly been made with her in mind, carved into the figure of a lion sitting on its haunches, though the Moste Potente Potions book it perched upon was all Lucius. If she had had her choice, she probably would have chosen arithmancy or ancient runes.

She clutched the handle of her trunk tightly in one hand, and the portkey in the other.

A thrum of excitement and a healthy dose of nerves ran through her.

“Sanctimonia Vincet Semper.”

The sensation of being slightly squeezed was familiar from the Quidditch World Cup, but it was far preferable to a side-along apparition. Before she knew it, the journey was over, and she was standing in the middle of Lucius’ study.

The sight that greeted her was not one she had ever expected to see. Lucius’ immaculate study looked as if it had gone several rounds with the Whomping Willow and the man himself was
raging as he upended the liquor cabinet, sending it crashing into the corner. If his desk weren’t so heavy, she was sure that would have been overturned as well.

The portkey fell from her hand, rolling across the carpet. Without thought, she released the handle of her trunk, taking a tentative step forward. Something was terribly, terribly wrong to coax such a reaction from him. She moved closer, unable to take her eyes off him, and felt something clang noisily off her foot. Lucius finally noticed her presence at the noise, his desk clock she realized as she glanced down, and he stopped mid-swing, an ink pot grasped tightly in his hand. He stood still, breathing hard from his exertion, and Hermione finally came to a stop several feet in front of him.

“What’s going-”

He cut her off. “Did you find it?”

It.

The diadem.

The one blasted thing she was supposed to track down.

She shook her head morosely. The ink pot slipped from his fingers and rolled to a stop beneath his desk. His hands found their way into his hair, and he began to pace in agitation, muttering something under his breath that she couldn't quite catch.

He obviously hadn’t had any luck either. She just stared at him for several long moments, watching him lose what was left of his composure. Hermione wasn’t sure what to do.

“Lucius?” Her voice broke through to him, and all at once, she was turned and slammed against the wall next to the full-length window. As the breath was knocked from her lungs, she felt his hand fist in her hair, forcing her head back to look up at him. He stared into her eyes, gazing into their depths, searching for something unnameable.

“What are you looking for?” she whispered, searching the depths of his eyes right back.

He didn't answer. The way he looked at her was unnerving, wild, almost feral, his obvious hunger a naked thing. She had seen him like this once before, and her body reacted to that predatory gaze now as it did then.

Hermione's eyes flicked downward, fixating on his parted lips, and she unconsciously spread her legs a little wider, feeling his hips settle between her parted thighs.

His mouth crashed against hers without warning, and he pressed his body fully against her pinning her to the wall, and she kissed him back with equal fervor as she moaned under his assault. Lucius’ hands roamed over her body desperately, igniting the fire in her that never seemed to fully extinguish. His hands insinuated themselves beneath her dress. His knee pushed between her thighs, the hard length of his erection rubbing insistently against her lower belly. Her hands gripped the bare skin of his shoulders and she tore her mouth from his, breathlessly, glancing down in confusion to see his crisp white shirt, torn down the middle, and already pushed halfway off his arms, before he hastily shrugged it the rest of the way off.

When had she done that?

She gasped, pulled from her reverie by the sound of ripping fabric. Hermione had only seconds to be pissed that Lucius had ripped up her new knickers in his haste before he unceremoniously pressed two spit-slicked fingers inside her. She was grateful that she was already so wet because
she knew, listening to him fumble with his belt as his fingers worked her open, that his preparations this time wouldn’t quite be enough.

He withdrew his fingers, spit into the palm of his hand, and coated the head of his cock with it before lining himself up, and grasping the back of her leg to hook it around his hip. When he thrust forward with an animalistic grunt, it was as uncomfortable as she had anticipated, bordering on painful without managing to cross that line. Hermione cried out, head thudding against the wall behind her as she willed her body to relax around him. He paused, a heartbeat, then two, and she was thankful for the small consideration as Lucius began to move. It was rough, as she had known it would be, and the way he violently snapped his hips against her made their last meeting look downright sweet by comparison. He had been playful then, toying with her. This was nothing so much as vicious, instinctual fucking.

One hand was splayed flat against the wall next to her head. The other was on her arse, gripping her tightly and pulling her into each violent thrust. Hermione was glad she was still fully clothed as her back scraped against the wall, but it soon became too painful, and when she pushed away from the wall at her back, Lucius lost his balance.

Lucius fell backwards, forcing her to cling desperately to his shoulders. They both went down hard, landing with a painful cry in a tangled heap on the floor. Lucius hit hard enough that it dazed him, his eyes momentarily rolling back, but he quickly shook himself from his stupor, rolling them both over to pin her again before she had even had a chance to get comfortable on top of him.

His nose was pressed into the hollow between her throat and shoulder, breathing deeply as his hips pistoned into her, and she didn’t need a wealth of experience to realize Lucius was in no state to tend to her needs. Hermione didn’t think he was even in any state capable of forming words, and that worried her a bit. He grunted in exertion, growing out his pleasure, his usual running commentary of filth conspicuously absent as his hips began to move in that familiar haphazard stutter.

Hermione released her death-grip on his shoulder, pushing her concern for him aside for the time being. Her hand worked down between them, seeking out her clit to concentrate on her own pleasure, and they both desperately hurtled toward their own individual climaxes.

His weight pressed her into the floor, his forehead resting against the plush carpet next to her ear. His breath was hot on her shoulder and they were both panting from their effort, drawing in great shuddering breaths. Hermione stroked her hands over the broad expanse of his upper back, her fingers winding into his hair at the nape unable to resist playing with it as they lay there. Merlin, how she loved playing with his hair. His lips moved over the side of her neck, tongue snaking out to lick wet trails across her skin, laving and suckling at the artery with a deep moan. Hermione felt his heartbeat pick up the pace where his sweaty chest pressed against her.

She wondered if it might have something to do with the emotional state she’d found him in, or possibly their furious coupling, though she had to admit, she didn’t know all that much about male anatomy, but Lucius hadn’t lost his erection when he’d climaxed. That had never happened before. He was strangely not taking advantage of his shortened recovery period. Instead he merely held himself still inside her, his chest rising and falling harshly as his mouth moved more aggressively over her throat.

Hermione caught his earlobe lightly between her teeth. His breath hitched and he paused, his teeth and tongue pressed against her skin. She ran her hand down his back, her fingers slipping beneath the waistband of his trousers. His lips curved into a smile against her throat, his mouth opening wider as he moved in to bite down.
Lucius withdrew completely, shoving away from her as though burned, a deep frown creasing his brow and marring his features. Before she knew what was happening, Hermione found herself suddenly thrust onto her stomach with Lucius behind her, pulling her onto her hands and knees. Without a word, he positioned himself between her legs and pressed forward insistently, though no longer violently. Whatever frustration having driven him moments ago had seemingly drained out of him completely. Lucius held her to him with an arm wrapped around her waist, one hand splayed across her lower back, pressing lightly, caressing with his thumb, and Hermione felt a strange tingling sensation deep within.

She had expected him to begin fucking her again immediately but his movements were minuscule as he merely ground his pelvis against her. That tingle beneath his hand dissipated, leaving her with a strange, somewhat empty feeling.

“Why aren’t you moving already?” Hermione groaned. She had no idea what he was waiting for. He pressed his lips between her shoulder blades as he slowly unzipped her dress and pushed it up and off over her head.

“Oh, I will,” he replied with a smile in his voice and against her skin, the first words he had said to her since slamming her against the wall. His exhaled breath was hot against her back. Her bra quickly followed her dress onto the floor, and just like that, Hermione was left in nothing but her torn knickers rucked up around her waist.

“Don’t you know anticipation is half the fun?” he asked playfully, one hand caressing her bare buttock, his fingers hooking beneath the lacy remains of her undergarments.

Lucius leaned over to the side, and Hermione turned her head to follow his sudden movement. She watched with interest as he dug through a pile of broken, expensive-looking things, though everything in the manor looked expensive. At length, he came away with a small, silver pot, clutched tightly in his hand. He set it on the floor beside him, quickly divesting it of its lid, and dipped his thumb inside, coating the digit in a thick viscous liquid. Hermione recalled seeing similar pots sitting on shelves nestled between one torture device or another.

“You seriously keep lubricant in your study?” And then her mind went blank as Lucius slid his thumb between her arse cheeks, unerringly finding her, as yet, untouched entrance. He didn’t press inside, merely massaged against her with the pad of his thumb making small circles, the lubricant warmed by their body heat.

“Always best to be prepared,” though prepared for what, he didn't elaborate upon.

“Did this make your list? Or should I stop?” he questioned quietly, continuing to tease as he awaited her reply. His hand on her lower back was soothing, encouraging her to relax, and Hermione knew with certainty that the decision was completely hers. He would go no further if she told him not to.

But this… This had made the list.

This was something she was curious about. And she wanted to know what it felt like before she attempted to do it to him. “Does it hurt?”

The hand rubbing her back moved to her hip, his fingers gripping her tightly. “I’ll do what I can.”

It wasn't a no.

She released a drawn out, shuddering breath. “No, don’t stop.” Her eyes went wide, and she
moaned as he breached the tight ring of muscle in the next instant, fully seating the slicked digit within her. Lucius took his time preparing her, seemingly in no rush. He didn’t spare the lubricant either as he twisted and thrust his fingers into her, opening her up for his imminent penetration, and he did it so carefully, it took her breath away.

A far cry from his usual outward appearance of either sarcastic amusement or cold calculation, Lucius Malfoy was, in quiet moments, pure, raw, emotion. He just didn’t show it easily. She craved catching a glimpse of an unguarded emotion sweep briefly across his face, knowing that it wasn’t something others saw and could readily imagine a look of wonder gracing his aristocratic features at that moment. She loved the way he could worship her tenderly one moment and then utterly defile her in the next. Despite the danger, or maybe because of it, Hermione knew this was why she kept coming back to him. She didn’t have to hide what she wanted, that was true, and that was a large part of it, but that dichotomy in him was also far more appealing than she had ever imagined, not that she had ever given him much thought before.

Finished with his work, he withdrew from her body, both fingers and cock, and Hermione whimpered from the loss until his hand returned to caress her back and she felt his hot, hard length begin to press its way into her. Her forehead dropped onto her arms, and she breathed steadily and deeply as he pushed inside with a strangled groan.

The head popped in and the rest of him slowly followed. She could feel herself clench around the invasion and tried to relax.

“That's it,” he murmured. “What do you think?”

Hermione hissed at the slight, uncomfortable burning sensation. “Feels strange… not bad, just different.”

Lucius’ hand on her back never ceased its soothing movements as he withdrew, slicked himself again, and reentered. It felt much better and Hermione pushed back against him experimentally. Lucius sat back onto his heels, pulling her upright, bringing her flush against his chest. The hand so recently caressing her lower back, wound around her to cup her breast, plucking at the nipple. Hermione settled onto Lucius’ lap, trusting him to set the pace, though she couldn’t keep from squirming in his embrace.

Her head rolled back onto his shoulder and she turned her face into the crook of his neck, breathing in his scent. There was no trace of the familiar scent of his cologne. He smelled like sex and sweat and beneath that, his expensive soaps and shampoos. His slippery right hand clutched at the flesh of her hip, skimming over the remnants of her torn knickers, guiding her movements as he drove into her at a leisurely pace. Hermione covered the hand at her waist with her own, linking their fingers together as her other hand wandered up and over his cheek, tangling in his hair, and drawing his mouth to hers for an awkwardly positioned kiss.

Lucius grimaced as her fingers grew demanding, tightening to pull at his scalp and force his mouth more firmly against hers. He parted his lips for her as she ran her tongue insistently across them, seeking entrance.

His breathing was shifting quickly from breathy little pants as he paced himself to something more ragged and less controlled. When she sucked his tongue into her mouth his breath caught in his throat and she thought he had stopped breathing completely for a moment. Emboldened by his ready compliance with her unspoken demands, Hermione decided it was time to test the waters a bit. She was going to have to get comfortable with giving him commands. Now was as good a time as any to practice.
Hermione was certain that he hadn’t noticed that she was no longer playing with his hair, and his eyes were closed so she knew he wasn’t aware that those same fingers had wandered down her stomach to dip between her thighs. She bit his tongue, not hard enough to draw blood but certainly enough to get his attention, causing him to growl lightly and buck his hips more forcefully.

“Open your eyes.” He did as she commanded, though they were dazed and unfocused.

Hermione held her hand in front of him.

“Have a taste,” she said with a sly grin, watching him intently.

His beautiful grey eyes, pupils nearly blown with lust, focused momentarily on the digits held before him. Without hesitation, his lips closed around her index finger, tongue wrapping around it as his eyes fluttered closed, and he attended to his task with a low moan. Hermione couldn’t deny that the way he so eagerly swallowed down his own spent offerings was such a turn on for her. He had, of course, kissed her without issue after she had gone down on him, but this was something she had wondered if he might balk at. The sight of him enthusiastically licking her fingers clean was nearly enough to trigger her climax as her neglected clit throbbed with need.

It seemed to be a turn on for him as well. At the first taste, his lazy rhythm faltered, and he began to rut against her in earnest as he sucked. She cried out as his left hand wandered down her belly in search of her clit and found its target.

“You’re close, aren’t you?” he whispered in her ear, as if he couldn't tell. Hermione knew better now. He massaged the bundle of nerves, his touch light as he circled it, and that light caress was nearly too much for her.

“Oh, so close…” she groaned as she rolled her hips against him.

“Then come with me, Hermione,” and she moaned at the rare use of her name, meeting his every thrust. Despite how close she was, her orgasm took her by surprise, stealing up on her unexpectedly. Her mouth opened in a silent scream as her head rolled back against his chest. A second orgasm followed immediately when his teeth clamped down on her shoulder, muffling his growled release, and she felt him pulse inside her as he buried himself to the hilt, spending himself deep inside.

Exhausted, Lucius slumped against her with a sigh of satisfaction, his head dropping onto her shoulder. Hermione wouldn’t have minded a round three, but Lucius was clearly well and truly spent. Her fingers grazed along his cheek, her hand cupping the back of his neck, winding into the damp strands at the nape. His lips moved across her shoulder lightly until he buried his face in her neck, nuzzling affectionately as his breathing calmed.

She picked through her words carefully, knowing how terrible Lucius was at communicating his feelings. He was so guarded that she knew he wasn't going to volunteer information, but she knew he would answer her questions so long as she asked the right ones in the right way. If she came right out and asked directly what was bothering him, however, he would shut her out as he had attempted to before. Professor Snape was turning out to be much the same, and it made her wonder if that reticence was a Slytherin trait or the result of a life spent in service to a wizard like Voldemort.

“So, no luck on your end either then.” He shook his minutely.

“Are you regretting it? Opposing Voldemort?” Lucius stilled behind her, tightening his hold on her waist. She gave him the time to consider her question as she continued to play with his silky locks.
“I’m still with you,” he murmured.

“That’s not what I asked,” she prodded gently, and was afraid she had pushed too hard when he remained silent for a time.

“Wouldn’t you?” His voice sounded fatigued in a way that had nothing to do with the incredible sex or even his earlier rage though they certainly contributed. In those two small words she could hear the real answer to her question. He was losing his confidence. He was losing faith in their mission.

She needed to snap him out of it. “I trust you.”

He pulled away from her with a weary sigh. “I’m not so sure you should.”

That didn’t sound good at all.

“You made a bit of a mess,” she said lightly, though she knew better than to actually ask what had happened to cause it.

Hermione wanted to look at him, to meet his gaze, but feared if she turned around he might shut down on her completely. He had all but admitted to having second thoughts about their mission, though considering her own lack of success, she might have been willing to give up too if she weren’t so tenacious or if she were less sure of the necessity of completing their task or if she had to answer to someone like Voldemort.

“I found the locket,” he whispered morosely and Hermione’s heart thumped loudly in anticipation. “It was a fake.”

“W-What?” she asked in disbelief, and this time she couldn’t stop herself turning around.

Fishing his wand out from under the desk where it had fallen, he performed a quick cleaning spell on them both and tucked himself back into his trousers. Hermione fumbled with her clothes, watching as he kicked at a pile of debris. He reached down, fished something from the pile, and tossed it to her. It was the locket they had been searching for, well the fake one anyway. She quickly scanned the accompanying note. “Who in Merlin’s name is R. A. B.?”

“I would assume it’s Regulus Arcturus Black, younger brother to Sirius, cousin to Narcissa and Bellatrix. He was also a Death Eater. I assume that’s how he found out.”

Hermione raked a hand through her hair, even more tangled than usual. “So, this Regulus found out about the horcruxes, or one at least. I wonder if he destroyed it.”

“Well, he’s unfortunately too dead to ask.” Lucius replied, his mood darkening. That did throw a kink into their plans.

“But this is still good,” she insisted. “We’re on the right track. This is proof.”

Lucius scoffed, looking over the mess he had made with disdain. “It would have been better if he’d left it.”

He turned his attention toward her. “Yes, we know that we’re on the right track, but now we have no idea if it’s in the wind or destroyed. I suppose it’s good that I chose you, though. At least we have access to both sides of the Black family.”

Lucius gave her a knowing look in response to her guilty expression. “You think I didn’t know about my wife’s dear cousin? About the hippogriff?”
Hermione furrowed her brow in confusion. If Lucius had known, why hadn’t he demanded satisfaction? After the trial and sentencing, Lucius had never mentioned it again. “You wanted Buckbeak dead…”

He rolled his eyes, shaking his head minutely. “Draco wanted it dead. I couldn’t have cared less what happened to it. As far as I was concerned, the episode served to teach him a lesson.”

“But you demanded a death sentence!”

“Yes, after he’d already tied my hands by announcing that was my intention for the beast.” He shrugged nonchalantly. “You may recall that he had a habit of threatening my wrath for every little slight, real or otherwise.”

“I remember.” Draco had been a thorn in her side since their first day.

“That was the last time he pulled that particular stunt and now that he hates me, I haven’t received a single owl. His mother gets to deal with that nonsense now.” Lucius’ mouth quirked in amusement. “Though, I somehow doubt ‘My mother will hear about this’ has quite the same effect. It should at least force him to stand on his own. Perhaps I should have transferred him years ago.”

As amusing as he apparently found the thought, Hermione could tell it was a sore subject for Lucius. The last time Draco had come up in conversation they had quarreled. Hermione had no wish to run the risk of quarreling again over his son, so she wisely stayed silent.

He toed a broken crystal decanter and sighed, “The servants will need to clean up in here. We should continue elsewhere. It’s long past time we find out just how quickly you can learn to shield your thoughts.”

She didn’t bother trying to hide the surprise on her face. “I thought you were giving up.”

“No. Not yet,” though the addendum ‘possibly soon’ hung in the air unspoken.

He moved toward the door. “I suppose I should let you get settled in. I’ll meet you in the library in an hour.”

And without a backwards glance, he exited the study, the door left standing wide open in his wake. Suddenly it seemed he was all business again, an emotional distance settling between them that made her head spin.

Chapter End Notes

Poor Lucius... Yes he killed again, but it was an accident. He's running scared and he didn't mean to. The next chapter is going to need a lot of work. So, I beg your patience. This holiday for them is going to be way different than I had planned in my original outline. Still going to be plenty of smut, but Lucius is going to have some demons to wrestle too.
Thirst for Knowledge

Chapter Notes

It's been a while since the last update. Hopefully I can update again before classes start up again. This chapter was surprisingly difficult to write, but not the slash part. That was easy. Oh yeah, in case you forgot, this story contains explicit m/m slash, and this won't be the last of it! So, enjoy or skim if that's not quite your thing.

Lucius leaned down low over his bathroom sink, half for support and half so that he could splash cold water on his face. His movements were jerky and frantic, flinging water droplets every which way. He gripped the counter-top tightly as he stared down his reflection, and dragged a shaking hand down his face.

"Pull yourself together, you fucking idiot," he hissed. "You're a Malfoy, for Merlin's sake!"

He should have waited to open the locket. The sun had long broken the horizon before he had finally moved from behind his desk, shakily confident that his mark would not burn with the heat of an angry summons. He hadn't planned to imbibe from his potion stash, but the agitation itching beneath his skin had convinced him of the necessity. Thus half the day had passed before he got around to fiddling with the locket. Really, in retrospect he could have waited a little longer.

If he had woken later...

If he had just spent another fifteen minutes… even ten… scrubbing off the ocean and the smell of that blasted cave and the memory of his panic and the guilt of his actions… He had been terrified, there was no shame in admitting that, so certain the movement at the edge of his vision had been the Dark Lord come to punish him for his betrayal. It hadn't been, of course, and Lucius found himself filled with regret over what he had done. The man had always done his job well, had always come through for him. He had struck to kill, yes, but he hadn't meant for it to be him.

If only-

If only a thousand other little ‘if onlys’…

But the sodding locket he had tossed onto his desk had caught his eye, something about it not quite right, and he had been drawn to investigate, to abandon the drink he had begun to make to calm his still-frayed nerves. If he hadn't opened it, he wouldn't have been raging when she had arrived. She would have tempered his outburst with that blasted optimism of hers. He wouldn't have come so dangerously close to sinking his teeth in her; the blood pounding just below the surface of her skin singing like a siren to him.

Lucius raked a hand through his hair with a weary sigh. Hermione Granger was unlike anything he had ever seen before. There was no denying that he had been wildly out of control with her, little better than an animal, and yet not a trace of fear in her eyes, nor a hint of hesitation. If there had been, he would have known. A small part of him vaguely recalled looking for it. He hadn't found it, and for that he was immensely relieved. Fear had proven itself a major trigger for his baser instincts on more than one occasion. It was an emotion he hoped never to see in her eyes or on her face.
As far as Lucius was concerned, the time when he ceded control to her couldn't arrive quickly enough. There was less chance of going too far if he were following her orders instead. Unfortunately, she wasn't yet ready to assume that role, which meant these two weeks he had with her were going to be a lot more difficult than he had thought.

It was going to be hard to keep up appearances, but he would do it; to bring down the Dark Lord, yes, but he couldn't deny that part of him wanted to keep her close. There was an undeniable connection between them. He felt it every time they came together. Surely she felt it too.

What he had with her was something he hadn't had in such a long time: a partner who played well with the darkness inside him. It was possibly even something he had never had before, and he was far too much a selfish bastard to give her up now. If he were a better man he would let her go. It shamed him to admit that he would take what he could get while he could get it, because when she found out the truth, and he was certain she would in the end, she was going to walk away from him completely.

Considering what he was, it would really be far less than he actually deserved.

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Lucius looked freshly washed and composed when he walked into the library. Hermione had taken her time getting settled into her old guestroom, fully intending to make him wait on her. It was a little childish perhaps, but she found herself in a bit of a spiteful mood following the way he had simply left her in his study, suddenly cutting himself off emotionally as if they hadn't just been tearing at each other like wild animals.

Evidently, four and a half years of fighting with dorm mates over bathroom privileges couldn't compete with Lucius Malfoy's pampering routine. The man had kept her waiting a good ten minutes beyond the specified hour as it was.

Hermione looked him over as he sat down across from her: dark grey shirt with the sleeves rolled up to his elbows, tucked into trousers that hugged his thighs just so, and elegant slippers rather than shoes. At least his effort was well worth the trouble. He just looked so casually fuckable, even if she were still hacked off at him, that her mind started to drift as she studied him.

Lucius lightly cleared his throat, shifting in his chair, and shaking his head a bit. “I feel as though I should apologize to you,” he stated formally, his ramrod posture matching the formality in the tone of his statement.

She quirked an eyebrow at that and then gave a resigned sigh. “I guess you did pay for them. It's just that I - I don't even know why I'm mad really. It's just that I.”

He frowned slightly in confusion. “I beg your pardon?”

Hermione narrowed her eyes, equally confused by his reaction. “You were talking about my knickers, weren't you?”

A look of realization dawned on his face as he recalled. “I was referring specifically to my appalling behavior, though I suppose that would be included.” He paused for a moment, as if a little embarrassed at the memories her words called to mind. “I'll replace them of course.”

She shook her head slightly. “It's not about that. I- I don't even know why I'm mad really. It's just that you didn't even notice.”

“I can assure you that some part of me noticed, but I'll endeavor to be sufficiently appreciative the
next time.” The stiff formality of his words remained, but beyond that she could hear a touch of that playful tone she was growing to crave. It helped to melt away some of her ire, and she found it difficult to stay mad.

“As for your behavior, I clearly didn't mind. In fact, I suppose, to be fair, I owe you a new shirt as well.” She ducked her head in sheepish embarrassment before peering at him through her lashes. He suppressed a small grin, his tongue peeking out to wet his lips. “I have dozens. Feel free to ruin as many as you’d like.”

The moment between them didn't last. Lucius was the one to end it first: a deep inhalation, a further straightening of his spine, and a mask of indifference settling on his face. He crossed one leg over the other, withdrew his wand, and held it lightly, nonchalantly in his right hand. “You have been studying, I presume?”

Hermione nodded.

“Yes, but...” She hesitated, wondering if she was giving too much away with what she wanted to ask. He merely raised an eyebrow, indicating that she should continue.

“Harry’s been training with Professor Snape, only it’s not going well, and I wondered…” She wondered if she would have the same trouble with it.

He didn’t seem at all surprised by the news, and really, if she were learning *Occlumency*, it wasn’t that unbelievable that Harry would be learning, or as it seemed, attempting to learn it too. Lucius chuckled lightly. “That doesn’t surprise me. From what I’ve heard, those two don’t get along at all. I think you can agree that you and I get on a great deal better than Severus and Mr. Potter.”

Yes, they certainly did at that.

“Do you know what happened between Professor Snape and Harry’s dad? Whatever it was, I'm sure that’s the cause of the trouble.”

Lucius inclined his head in agreement. “Yes, I believe it is, but he would never forgive me if I told you.”

“Is there anything you can tell me?”

He tapped his bottom lip thoughtfully for a moment. “I doubt it would surprise you to learn that Severus was not well-liked.”

She shook her head. It wasn’t surprising at all. She had always respected his skills of course, but until recently she couldn't say that she had ever even remotely liked him. Severus Snape had a personality that was off-putting on the best of days to put it lightly.

“They hated each other from nearly the beginning. Complete opposites. Severus was bookish and Potter was, for lack of a better term, a rising Quidditch star, though that in and of itself wasn't the issue.”

“But you won't say what the issue was?”

Lucius shook his head. “No. Potter and his friends were favorites of Dumbledore. They could get away with just about anything, much like young Mister Potter does now. They took advantage of that, and due to the issues between them, Potter bullied Severus at every opportunity. But anymore on the matter, I'll not say.”
Hermione had seen just how cruel Lucius could be in the past. The entire Buckbeak ordeal sprang readily to mind. It was certainly saying something if Lucius Malfoy was calling someone else a bully. She would have some things to think about later, because she had never really considered the possibility that James Potter might have been the instigator, or that by bullying Harry the way he did, Professor Snape might be enacting revenge on his tormentor, vicarious though it may be.

“Now, I believe your book mentions that there are several ways of going about penetrating a person’s mind,” he said, putting an abrupt end to anymore questions about Severus Snape.

“Yes, I read that. There are a couple of different techniques a witch or wizard can use and it feels different for the person being probed based on the technique.” The book didn’t go into much detail about how it was different, but she assumed that was why Occlumency had to be taught firsthand.

“What kind of information do you think the Dark Lord would pull from your mind? What do you think would interest him?” Lucius’ questions tripped around in her brain for a few moments as she considered the possibilities. He remained patiently curious as he waited for her answer, the expression on his face not giving anything away.

“I suppose he would want information about my allies,” she replied at last. “He would want to know what our plans are for the war effort.”

“Only those things?” Lucius questioned lightly, but Hermione couldn’t think of anything else important enough for him to want to know about.

He shrugged elegantly. “Well I suppose we’ll see.”

Lucius raised his wand, aiming it at her head. “This first method is the one you’re most likely to encounter. It’s simple. Straightforward. Favored by ministry interrogators.”

Hermione took a deep breath and nodded to let him know she was ready.

“I’m going to delve into your memories and search for the things that the Dark Lord would search for. Let's find out if you’ve guessed correctly. *Legilimens.*”

Hermione hissed in pain, feeling as if her skull were being pierced by a sword. She could feel Lucius’ phantom presence in her mind, almost as if she were guiding him somewhere. The memory formed quickly from shadows and thin air and she recognized the first D.A. meeting, that first furtive foray in the Hog’s Head. She could see herself pulling out parchment and quill. The memory dissipated, changed, almost as if he had lost interest in it, and then her and his phantom presence were in the halls of Hogwarts and she swore she could feel him smirking.

Hermione felt herself propelled along the hall faster, walking quickly to her destination even though she tried hard to fight against letting Lucius see where she was going. She had never intended to let him know about that despite their alliance. It wasn’t her secret to betray, but now he was witnessing everything: the spells they were learning, the people involved, their location, and she couldn’t kick him out of her mind no matter how hard she fought to do so. Hermione was gasping when he released her suddenly and without warning. Her head throbbed dully where his spell had pierced into her mind.

There was an inscrutable look on his face. “Keeping secrets from me, are you? I might think you don’t fully trust me.”

“It wasn’t my secret to share. I was being cautious.” There was also the issue of the precautions she had placed on the parchment, and Hermione touched a hand to her forehead breathing a sigh of
relief to find nothing there.

Surprisingly enough, Lucius was pleased with her answer. “Good. Yes, the Dark Lord would love to know all about your little army and who’s in it and what they know. Perhaps while you're here you would consider showing me what you’ve learned?”

Hermione wasn’t sure that was a good idea. She had already told him about Harry's failed efforts, which she probably shouldn't have done. He was clearly having second thoughts despite his current willingness to soldier on. If he decided to turn against them the consequences would be dire, and it would all be her fault.

Either his thoughts were in line with hers, or hers were written clear on her face. “Still hesitant. Not a bad idea, especially considering that unfortunate lapse that so recently took place in my study. Now tell me why you should consider it.”

“You have experience I can learn from. I stand to gain more than I would lose.” She could potentially learn so much more dueling Lucius with his wealth of experience than even Harry could teach her.

“True. None of your friends have fought a war, or stood against aurors the likes of ‘Mad-Eye’ and lived to fight again. We’ll add it to the agenda then, shall we?”

She nodded her consent. Her vacation was becoming less vacation-like by the minute, not that she was really complaining.

“Now then, this next method is the one the Dark Lord prefers. As you can probably guess, he likes inflicting pain, not only on his enemies, but on his allies as well. As such, his method can best be described as a brutal invasion.”

“That doesn't make any kind of sense. Why would he do such a thing?”

“I wouldn't presume to know the inner workings of the Dark Lord's mind. In my experience, he tends to rule through fear more often than not, perhaps to demonstrate how powerful he is. I would expect that's part of it. Are you ready?”

“I'm ready.”

He looked at her apologetically. “It’s going to hurt.”

He raised his wand again, but this time said nothing. The second time he entered her mind was nothing like the first. If she had thought the first time had hurt, then the second was absolute agony. She screamed as her skull felt like it was being split open, slowly, again and again until she was looking down at her feet, standing on a sidewalk that she recognized. Hermione looked up confirming her suspicions and her heart seized in her chest.

No! she growled inside her head, and was certain she heard an answering, Yes.

Her feet moved inexorably up the steps and through the front door of her parents’ house. She looked into the kitchen, calling for them, but there was no answer, and dread swept through her. Somehow, she knew. She couldn’t see, but she knew, and so she rebelled against the pull she felt to go upstairs. Whatever was up there was bad. It was not something she ever wanted to see.

Her hand landed lightly on the banister.

Please don’t, she begged. Her right foot came to rest on the first step.
And then Lucius mercifully pulled her back to reality.

Hermione's face was wet when she came back to herself, the tears flowing freely down her cheeks. She scrambled backwards, and in her haste to flee the vision, knocked over her heavy chair.

"Why would you show me that?!" she hissed between ragged breaths, clutching tight to the shelf behind her.

"I didn't actually." And it was true, even if the implication was there lurking just out of sight. "He will."

Lucius grimaced in apology as he slowly lowered his wand. "Perhaps we should take a break."

Hermione swiped at her tears with shaking hands. "No. No, I'm fine," she insisted.

Lucius didn't question her decision, but neither did he raise his wand again. "I'm not as adept as the Dark Lord is. My skills at *Legilimency* can best be described as rudimentary."

"Rudimentary?" she repeated skeptically.

"What did I actually show you, Hermione? An empty house that you recognized?" Once again, his words were nothing but truth. "Your imagination supplied the rest. He can create as I cannot. When he gets inside your head, all your senses will fool you, and you won't know what's real and what isn't."

"He's done it to you?"

Lucius laughed, a brittle sound filled with more pain than she had thought possible. "He has shown me my greatest fears and my wildest dreams. To be a Death Eater is to live on the knife's edge between devotion and terror never knowing which way you'll tip in the end."

That didn't sound like any way to live to her.

"He'll use them against you; anyone you care about. He'll kill them in your mind a thousand times over, and make it so real that you will do anything to make it stop. And then if you don't give him what he wants, he'll do it for real."

It was no wonder why Lucius was so cautious. It was no wonder he had sent Draco away before embarking on this journey with her.

"Unfortunately," he continued, "he won't treat you gently. The good news, if you can call it that, is that you know what he's doing. It's just immensely painful. I prefer a more subtle approach."

Hermione sniffled, regaining her composure, and claiming her seat again. "Let's get on with it then." She desperately needed to move on from the nightmare she had nearly witnessed.

"I really do think we should—"

She cut him off, steely determination in her voice. "I'm not interested in taking a break right now. I'm interested in learning. We don't have that much time."

"No, not nearly enough...," he agreed. "Well then, perhaps we can discuss what I saw the first time I entered your mind."

She shook her head emphatically. "I can't tell you about the meetings."
“No, that was the second.”

“What?” she whispered as she lifted her eyes to meet his, horrified at the implication. He had been sitting across from her, his wand on his knee. Lucius hadn’t moved a muscle. He hadn’t said a word. She hadn’t felt a thing. He couldn’t really have… could he?

“No… that’s… you couldn't have,” she declared with as much certainty as she could muster.

Lucius tilted his head, amusement clearly evident. “Then how would I know exactly how much you approve of my *casual* look?” And there was no doubt what the emphasis on the word ‘casual’ referred to. He had slipped into her mind and she hadn't even known it.

“I told you I preferred the subtle approach. Just a little trick I learned from Severus. Luckily you shouldn’t need to defend against it. The other two are far more common.”

“Those thoughts were private.”

Lucius gave her an amused grin. “Were they really? I barely skimmed the surface. From my perspective you may as well have been shouting them aloud.”

A worrying thought came to mind. “Have you been in my head before?”

“No. I don't need to. You aren't really all that subtle.”

Hermione narrowed her eyes in anger at him, and then belatedly realized she had just confirmed his assertion. “Not even in the beginning?” she huffed.

Lucius shook his head. “Now,” he set his wand down on the table beside himself with a sly grin. “let’s talk about what you did wrong rather than all these terrible things you want to do to me. Tell me. What do *you* think?”

“I failed,” she answered sullenly. “Couldn't keep you out.”

“Yes, as far as failures go, all three were spectacular.”

She managed somehow to keep her anger in check as she asked, “Are you just rubbing it in or do you have a point?”

“The question you should be thinking about is not ‘Why did you fail?’ You failed because you're a novice. You can't really have thought you would succeed on a first try.”

No, she hadn't thought that; vaguely hopeful perhaps, but realistically she had known the odds. “So what is the question?”

“I'm interested in what you think about *how* you failed.”

“How? My mental shields weren't strong enough.” He'd broken through easily. That was clearly the case.

Lucius was nodding absently. “So, if I taught you, in essence, how to build a fortress around your mind, you would be able to keep me out?”

Hermione opened her mouth to respond and then closed it again. It sounded like a trick question.

“Even if you could build something that strong, it's unlikely you would be capable of maintaining that level of shielding for as long would be necessary. What else?”
She tapped her foot impatiently as she thought about the question. If she couldn't build a wall around what she wanted to protect…

“Hide it then? If it isn't there-”

“Do you truly think that would deter him? If something is clearly missing that should be there, you can be certain that he will search for it until he finds it. Not only that, but he will have the added certainty that what you're hiding is what he's looking for.”

It all seemed so hopeless to her, like no matter what, it would be impossible to keep Voldemort out of her head. And yet somehow Lucius could clearly do it. “What do you suggest?” she asked, realization suddenly dawning on her.

He smiled as if she had finally found the correct answer. “I've told you before that the Dark Lord is incredibly mistrustful.”

She nodded and he continued. “In his mind, everyone has something to hide. I don't try and keep him out. I give him what expects. The less dangerous memories I leave untouched. They add authenticity. Others, the ones I don't care for him to know, I change just enough, otherwise I find the lie is unconvincing.”

Hermione shook her head slightly. “I still don't understand. How would that even work? Surely he would know.”

Lucius looked down at the wand near his hand for a moment. “You know that I sent Draco away to protect him?” he asked quietly. “If he were here so close to the danger, I don't think I could do this. A father should keep his son safe. Wouldn't you agree?”

“Yes.”

He looked up at her, nodding slightly, and then he looked back down at his wand, and in exactly the same quiet voice as before, he asked, “You know that I sent Draco away because he's weak? He isn't nearly the wizard he should be. How can he properly serve the Dark Lord if he can barely keep up with you?”

Lucius met her eyes once more, and there was nothing in those stormy grey orbs to distinguish the two statements. “The surface may change, but the core remains the same. The Dark Lord already believes the worst from his followers. It is, by no means, an easy feat, but neither is it exceedingly difficult to give him what expects to find.”

Hermione chewed on her lip as she digested Lucius’ words. It made absolutely perfect sense. He would stop searching the moment he thought he had broken through, and if the surface matched his beliefs, he most likely wouldn't look any deeper. Against someone like Voldemort, so certain of their own power, it made perfect sense. “I don't know if I can do it. I'm not that good at lying.”

His voice was pitched low, flavored with reluctance as he toyed with his wand, rolling it between his fingers. “I know. It's what has concerned me the most since the beginning. In fact, it was the only thing that made me hesitate when choosing you for this task. I felt your strengths outweighed that single weakness.”

Hermione had little time to be awed by such a confession. He was still speaking. “You may find your own method. Most people do. To succeed, you have to know not only who your enemy is, but what he thinks of you as well.”

“You want me to get inside Voldemort's head?” The thought turned her stomach.
Yes, but not right now. Now, I really must insist we set this aside. We can return to this later if you'd like.”

Hermione finally acquiesced to his insistence. Just because they were suspending her Occlumency study for the time being, did not mean that she couldn't still pick his brain in the interim. Lucius would know Voldemort's mind better than she could ever hope to, and somehow she would use that knowledge because she refused to fail at such an important task.

As it turned out, when Lucius had decided to call a halt to her lesson, he had meant it to be a full stop, even going so far as to change the scenery and have them take their afternoon tea in a cozy little parlour looking out over the gardens. Most of the plants were still dead from winter, but the imposing view was somehow all the more impressive for it.

He had allowed no questions about Occlumency at all as they were served by his staff. On her first attempt, he had brusquely informed her, “You misunderstand the point of this exercise.”

“What exercise?” she had exclaimed, her irritation clear. Instead of answering, Lucius had opened up a copy of that morning’s Prophet and begun reading quietly as he sipped his tea. She fumed, taking her own tea in silence, a silence that lasted a mere five minutes before she attempted to question him a second time.

Lucius glanced up at her over the rim of his cup and murmured, “You really are rather relentless, aren't you?” before turning the page and continuing to ignore her.

He clearly was not going to engage her curiosity until he chose to do so. His pointed silence left her alone with her racing thoughts, and the longer it went on, the more irritable she became. She had never been the type to sit idly by when there was work to be done and it was grating on her nerves.

What was he doing besides wasting time they could put to better use? Hermione was just preparing to make a third attempt at questioning him, when quick as a striking snake, Lucius lifted his wand, pointed it at her across the table, and with a murmured Legilimens, was in her head again with seemingly little effort. He struck with precision and was gone from her mind nearly as quickly as he’d entered. She massaged her temples, willing the dull throb to dissipate. When she looked back up, there was no hint in his body language that he had even attacked her.

“You should learn to control that temper, else it will be used against you.” He sipped at his tea again.

“Because you were so controlled earlier,” she threw at him rather harshly and watched a shadow pass briefly over his face.

“A momentary lapse,” but Hermione heard more emotion in those words than perhaps Lucius expected before he shifted again. “Do you think the Dark Lord is going to give you time to prepare yourself? If you’re lucky, you’ll spend a few days in a cell awaiting judgement before you’re thrown in front of him without warning.”

She finally understood what he was doing. The exercise had been an approximation of that and she should have been using the time wisely instead of wasting it. Lucius returned to his paper without another word and she hastily began to prepare the best she could for his next attack.

After her fifth consecutive failure, she was so frustrated that she was ready to hex something. Actually she wanted to hex him. He raised his wand, ready to probe her mind once more and
without thought she drew her own wand. She beat him to it by a fraction, watching his eyes go wide with surprise. There was no reason for it to work, and she hadn't expected it to, other than when she hissed the word ‘Legilimens’ she meant it with every fibre of her being. She saw him fall to his knees, his hand grasping at the tablecloth, the tea service crashing to the floor, and she heard him groan clutching his head just before everything went black.

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Dark fog swirled around her, obscuring her vision as she was dropped unceremoniously into Lucius’ mind. She couldn’t see him or anything else as the fog wrapped around her, retreated, and returned. There was a brief flash: rumpled bedding and blood stained sheets, but then the darkness returned with a vengeance. Hermione thought she heard the sound of crying and then it was gone and she couldn't be sure.

Straining her ears, she listened intently for some clue that would tell her where she was. Whispers sounded out all around her, coming from everywhere and nowhere at the same time. They overlapped such that she couldn’t make out distinct words. A long, low, guttural noise sounded close at her side and Hermione turned toward where she thought the sound came from.

Seeing the fog shift a fraction, she could just begin to make out a figure: Lucius. It was just enough that she could see his face, eyes closed, half obscured by his long hair and the shadows dancing around them. As the shadows eddied and swirled, threatening to reveal more before closing in again, Hermione could make out, just barely, that he looked so much younger. He looked to be in his twenties, so Hermione guessed that whatever memory she had been thrown into must have taken place near the end of the first war. She looked closer, wishing the memory would fully form so that she could see what was going on.

He groaned again, the way he did when he buried himself inside her, and Hermione suddenly realized exactly what kind of memory she had landed in. Now she wasn’t really keen on seeing more. She didn’t want to watch him fucking another woman. Even if it was just a memory that was probably as old as she was, Hermione had no desire to actually witness it. She had no illusions that they were exclusive, but if she didn’t think about it, it was easier to delude herself into believing that she had him all to herself. He yelped suddenly, and Hermione’s attention shifted back to him, unexpectedly interested in the unfamiliar sound despite herself. What had the witch just done to him? He had never made such a sound with her.

She studied his face more closely, what she could see of it anyway. He opened his eyes and if Hermione didn’t know that it was impossible, she would have sworn he was looking right at her. As close as she was to him, may two feet away, the effect of him ‘looking at her’ while voicing his pleasure with another was unnerving, causing her stomach to somersault. His eyes were heavy-lidded with arousal and he was clearly drunk, his bloodshot gaze going in and out of focus. His cheek pressed into the pillow beneath him, his lips slightly parted in a half smirk as he made another low sound of pleasure.

His hand came into view out of the fog beside his head, and he began to push himself up, putting weight on his elbow first. Hermione wanted to look away again. The witch beneath him would imminently be revealed and so long as she didn’t see his partner’s face, she could imagine that it was her. Just as he began transferring his weight to his hand, the fog started to clear. His arm became visible and then his shoulder. The darkness slipped from him like a silk sheet, revealing more of his body. He fell back to the bed with a loud grunt as if all the air were knocked out of his lungs. No, Hermione realized with a frown, he hadn’t fallen. A hand splayed wide between his shoulder blades had pushed him back down roughly as he had tried to get up. Hermione gasped out loud, thankful the participants couldn’t actually hear her. The hand holding him in place was
Her eyes followed the pale arm upward, skipping past the shoulder, the darkness clearing just ahead of her line of sight. It disappeared completely, revealing both men and the room around them as her gaze landed on the incredibly young face of her potions professor, who possibly looked more drunk than Lucius. Lucius lay prone, face-down, legs spread wide on either side of Professor Snape. Snape knelt between those long legs, bent over the man below to hold him in place with one hand in the middle of his back, and one at his hip, his cock slowly withdrawling from Lucius’ quivering body. Snape snapped his hips forward, causing Lucius to yelp again, fisting a hand in the pillow, and Hermione realized what had caused the previously unfamiliar sound. She watched with growing arousal as Lucius attempted to rise once more only to be shoved into the mattress more forcefully. He glanced back over his shoulder briefly with a playful scowl, and wriggled his hips, eliciting a groan and curse from the man behind him. Snape released Lucius’ hip and a sharp staccato crack resounded through the room as Snape’s open palm connected with Lucius’ backside. Lucius gasped at the unexpected pain, hips grinding against the bed as that same hand soothed the reddening area. Returning to its previous position, the hand pulled insistently at a sweat-slick thigh, urging the man attached to it to move.

Lucius struggled to get his knees underneath him, hampered by the awkward position Snape was holding him down in and the fact that the man was still buried hilt-deep inside him. He eventually managed it, lifting his hips high, his chest and face still pressed into the mattress. He looked back one more time, rocking forward slowly before slamming his hips back against Snape once, impaling himself on the other man’s cock with a throaty grunt. Snape hissed sharply, a pained look settling on his face, his eyes drifting closed with the pleasure of it.

Lucius’ voice was thick with arousal and yet commanding, even from his submissive position, even as inebriated as he clearly was. Even with another man’s cock deep inside him, he was clearly in charge, and any control he relinquished was because he chose to. “Don’t worry about hurting me, Severus. I can handle it. Just take what you need from me,” he waited until Snape opened his eyes and when they locked on his own said in a soft voice full of emotion, “and for Merlin’s sake, let her go.”

Snape began tentatively, seemingly unsure of himself, but picked up speed quickly. Lucius moved beneath him, meeting each forward snap of Snape’s hips with a thrust backwards of his own. His voice sounded raw, animalistic, and he cried out so beautifully each time their bodies met, voice muffled slightly by the pillow his face was pressed into. Lucius reached beneath himself and gripped his cock in hand, stroking harshly in tandem with the cock thrusting into his arse. He reached back blindly with the other, fingertips landing high on Snape’s abdomen and dragged them down toward his hip. His hand snaked around, fingers hooking the flesh of Snape’s backside, and jerked forward, encouraging his partner to fuck him harder. Sliding his hand down the length of Lucius’ spine, Snape gripped his waist with both hands, digging fingers into flesh with bruising force. He obliged the unspoken plea, abandoning his control, pounding into Lucius ruthlessly. Lucius thrashed beneath him, moaning, whimpering with such need. Hermione had never heard the like from him before. He screamed his release, hips jerking violently as he spilled himself all over the bedspread below.

Hermione rocketed back into her own mind, stunned at what she had just witnessed. Before her, Lucius was panting heavily, picking himself up off the floor, the force of her spell having sent him reeling.

“Impressive. You’d make quite the skilled Legilimens with proper training,” he managed between
breaths, “but the Dark Lord wouldn’t tolerate a stunt like that.” He was finally getting himself under control, “He’d kill you on the spot.”

Her thoughts were a jumbled mess and she struggled to sort through them as she began to stammer, “You and Professor Snape…” but she stopped, unable to put into words everything that was in her head. Hermione shook her head to clear it as Lucius stepped toward her and gripped her chin in one hand tilting her face up.

He snapped his fingers in front of her nose several times, trying to catch her attention. “Calm down and focus. I can see you enjoyed that but you have work to do right now. Now then,” he said, wand at the ready, and pointed at her once again, “one more time. Legilimens .” And she steeled herself as she felt the familiar tendrils of his magic as he attempted to invade her mind once again.
A new Year's Eve gift to you all! I was hoping to get it done over the holiday break and I managed it! Sadly the next chapter will take longer. I'm playing around with a few ideas and I really want to finish up the next installment (or at least make headway) on The Golden Calf. It'll be a while, but hopefully not too awfully long. Enjoy and have a happy and safe New Year's Eve everybody!

She spent an eternity in the shower, the scalding spray beating down soothingly on the back of her head and neck. Lucius had not treated her with kid gloves, not that he should have, and she felt it as a deep ache in her skull. He could have entered her mind unobtrusively, but hadn't. She supposed she should be thankful he hadn't used Voldemort's technique beyond that one time. If he had, she doubted she would even be standing now. She doubted she would be coherent enough to complain about it. She certainly wouldn't feel well enough for Lucius’ rather erotic memory to run on repeat in her head.

She still wasn't pleased that the memory co-starred Professor Snape. Hermione didn't particularly care to know quite that much information about her professor, but couldn't deny that once she had recovered from her initial shock, Lucius’ enthusiasm had been incredibly appealing in a way she hadn't expected. Apparently there was a bit of a voyeuristic streak in her in addition to everything else. She shut off the water, spelling herself dry, and dressing for bed. Then she immediately exited her room and headed down the hall without a second thought.

She didn't hear a sound for the longest time after knocking on his door. Given how thick the carpeting in his rooms was though, it wasn't really surprising. The ornate handle turned slowly and the door swung open revealing an even more deliciously casual Lucius than earlier: silk dressing gown belted loosely at his waist, matching lounge pants, no shirt, but he didn't sleep in anything anyway. In fact, he was actually overdressed for bed. Perhaps he had been reading. She felt under-dressed in her t-shirt and mismatched pajama bottoms and fluffy robe, but Lucius didn't really seem to notice. If he did, he didn't draw attention to it.

Lucius leaned against the door frame and crossed his arms over his chest, giving her a sidelong glance both playfully stern and suspicious at the same time.

“You really are rather relentless... aren't you?” But this time his voice was filled with affectionate amusement, and he reached out a hand for hers to draw her against him, pulling her gently across the threshold. He lifted a hand to cup her cheek and captured her lips in a tender kiss as he embraced her.

Hermione pushed him backwards, her hand over his heart, closing the door behind her with a quiet click. She didn't remember crossing his sitting room, didn't remember passing through the door into his bedroom proper, but when he broke the kiss they were standing at the foot of his bed, and she could feel his heart beating fast against her palm.

“After that memory, I thought you might have decided to run the other way.” His fingers plucked at the belt on her robe, a slow, mischievous smile lighting up his face. “Unless it actually excited you more than I thought.”
“Yes, it did unfortunately.”

“Unfortunately?” he echoed, slipping her fluffy robe off her shoulders. Where he threw it, she had no idea, nor did she really care.

She ran her hands down the front of his robe, pausing at his waist to undo the belt. “I have no idea how I'm even going to look at Professor Snape when I go back.”

Hermione could feel the shudder course through his skin as she splayed her hands across his stomach and around his waist to curl against his back. “Just don’t let him know that you’ve seen him naked. He wouldn’t appreciate it.”

She rolled her eyes and groaned and Lucius laughed, sinking to the bed. Hermione let him guide her forward until she stood between his knees, his hands on her hips grasping at the hem of her shirt and lifting it slightly. She wanted so badly to crawl into his lap and let him kiss her senseless. Instead, she settled for letting her hands rest on his shoulders while his lips blazed a trail across the exposed skin of her midriff, beginning at the jut of one hip bone and moving across to the other.

“That memory of yours…” She paused, waiting for him to elaborate.

“Oh? What about it?” His voice sounded politely curious, but it was clear that he wasn't really interested in talking as he continued kissing her stomach. If she wanted to know more, she was going to have to press the issue herself.

A few rather unkind words crossed her mind, because he didn't sound suitably distracted enough to not be toying with her. “You’re really going to make me ask?”

He favored her with a roguish smile that made her stomach flip as he glanced up at her through his lashes.

“Yes, I am. I thought you would have realized that by now. You should be able to talk about these things if they interest you. It’s important when it comes to this… lifestyle,” and then he returned to his self-imposed task as though he didn’t have a care in the world.

Well, the bastard has a point.

She licked her dry lips as she considered what to ask him. The problem was that she had so many questions, and she didn’t know where to begin. She wanted to know those things about Lucius, but she wasn’t quite sure she really wanted that much information about Professor Snape’s sexual proclivities.

Lucius lowered her shirt and gave her a sigh of resignation. “Shall I get you started then?”

At her hesitant nod he waved his hand over the mattress, indicating she should sit down beside him.

“Severus…,” he began slowly, searching for the right words once she had settled herself, her knee brushing against his thigh. “Severus was not my first, not even close, but that was his first time in that sort of situation. He was…upset…so I took him out for a few drinks to try and get his mind off it. I hadn’t planned on ending up in bed with him, but after enough firewhiskey it just seemed like a brilliant idea. I don’t recall who kissed whom first, but it was most likely me.”

That seemed to be almost a given. Having spent time with both men, Professor Snape didn't seem the type to initiate human contact, of any sort, while it was all too easy to envision Lucius as a handsy flirt.
"You two just seem so different. How did you even get involved? I know you were in the same house, but…"

Hermione trailed off at Lucius’ affronted expression. Had she said something wrong? “Severus was a first-year when I graduated. I realize you’re young, too young really, and I realize that we roleplayed the last time we met… but you are the youngest person I’ve been with since I attended school. I didn't realize you had such a low opinion of me, but I'm not a-”

Her eyes went wide, and her words came out in a sudden rush. “Oh no! That's not what I was implying at all. I didn't even realize there were that many years between you.”

He didn't appear assuaged despite her insistence. “Lucius…That never crossed my mind. I assumed there was a reason you’ve never asked me about shaving certain areas.”

She shrugged slightly as their eyes met again. “Girls talk, you know.”

His brows knitted together, an incredulous expression on his face. “Do the boys your age really ask such things?”

“Well, I don't think it's common practice, but apparently some do.” Lucius snorted inelegantly at that.

“They're sixteen. They should just be grateful anyone even wants to have sex with them,” he groused.

Hermione found herself quite agreeing with that statement.

He frowned and shook his head slowly as if he couldn't even fathom asking of her what she was suggesting. “I wouldn't presume to tell you what to do with your body anyway. I don't really care about that sort of thing, but I doubt I would be able to touch you until you'd grown it back.”

His knee-jerk reaction actually comforted her more than she had thought it would. It was more than obvious that their age difference had been on his mind at some point, perhaps more than once, and that it had bothered him enough to make him feel defensive about it. Lucius was a complex man. She still didn't truly understand how his brain worked, but it was clear there were lines he refused to cross. It was both amazing and frustrating how those lines were so clearly defined in some places and awfully blurry in others; the rules governing his moral code known only to him.

“Right. Got it. No scorched earth if I want you to touch me.” Hermione took his hand in hers and pressed her cheek against his shoulder briefly before she added, “Just so we're clear, you do know I'm of age, right?”

He nodded absently, looking slightly relieved by the confirmation. “I had thought so, but then I wasn't quite sure. You just look so young and it wasn't like I had planned any of this and then I thought... Well, you know how time-turners are. Honestly, I was a little nervous to go back and check.”

“Well, you can stop fretting then. I turned sixteen in September, even without any help from a time-turner. I may be barely legal, but I am legal.”

“Good to know.”

“Anyway, what I was trying to get at, before I was rudely interrupted,” and she gave him a pointed look to which he raised his hands playfully in surrender, “is that even though you were in the same house, you two don't seem like you would move in the same circles.”
“Ah,” Lucius replied, nodding in understanding. “Appearances can be deceptive. I was a prefect. Narrowly beat out for Head boy. As bookish as well nearly as bookish as Severus. We have more in common than you think, but I suppose our differences keep our friendship interesting.”

“Differences like…”

“Severus has always abhorred social interaction.” That was putting it mildly in her opinion. She had seen him scowling at school feasts often enough. “I encouraged him to spread his wings so to speak.”

She narrowed her eyes at him, reading between the lines. “You mean you dragged him out against his will?”

“For his own good, of course,” he replied nonchalantly, leaning back to recline languidly on his elbow.

“Oh, of course.” Hermione tried to envision what a teenaged Lucius would have been like. The image in her head didn't resemble his son at all. It didn't really even resemble the ideal she had held since her first day at Hogwarts of what a Slytherin was like. If anything, she suspected a teenaged Lucius had more in common with Harry and Ron than he did with Draco. She wouldn't be telling him that, of course, and trying to keep it a secret from him would actually be good practice for her.

“Severus, on the other hand,” he continued, “is steady. Grounded. He has always had a way of keeping me tethered to the earth; an excellent complement for my somewhat flamboyant nature.”

He paused for a moment, before adding with a devastatingly wicked grin, “And then of course, attempting to crack that dour shell of his is both nearly impossible and endlessly entertaining.”

“Hang on. You befriended him because you got a kick out of giving him a hard time?” She exclaimed in disbelief.

“Well, he’s also rather brilliant, but yes that too,” and he didn't seem at all disturbed by the accusation. Actually, she was starting to think Lucius had probably been a bit more like the twins, though, as there was only one of him, perhaps slightly more subdued. She shuddered at the thought.

“But Professor Snape isn't interested in men.” She stopped, realizing that she didn't actually know enough to make that kind of declaration even though a woman had clearly been mentioned in the memory. Lucius was evidently interested in both. Maybe Professor Snape was too, though from what she had seen, he didn't seem interested in anyone.

“No, he isn't,” Lucius confirmed. “He’s never indicated such a desire anyway.”

“Then how in the world did you talk him into that?”

Lucius reached out to take her hand, running a finger lightly over the inside of her wrist, stroking downward towards the center of her palm. “From what I recall, there wasn't much talking involved, though in all honesty I really don't remember all that much. What you saw was about it. No, for Severus there's only ever been one, though it was never really what I would call healthy, not that I’ve ever really had much room to talk.”

The mystery woman.

The one Lucius had referred to in the memory.
“Who was she?”

He shook his head. “Oh, that’s not my story to tell. It's his. If you’d like to know more, you’ll have to ask him.” Hermione was certain that was never going to happen. She really hoped she wouldn't accidentally reveal that she knew as much as she did to Professor Snape as it was.

“You said it was the first time. Do you and he...” She couldn’t believe she was even asking the question.

Lucius smiled at her reddening cheeks though he didn’t comment on them.

“No, we're no longer intimate. It happened the once only, and it was nothing so much as a drunken fluke. We don’t have that kind of friendship.” Hermione wasn’t sure if the information relieved or disappointed her.

“Wait!” she exclaimed with sudden enlightenment, the bits of information swirling around in her brain finally clicking into place.

“If you two are such good friends, why isn't he the one helping you?” Professor Snape was an incredibly capable wizard and he could move about the school more easily than she could. It made so much more sense for him to have been the one chosen.

A look of alarm crossed Lucius’ face, and he sat up abruptly, all traces of his previous good humour gone. “You cannot let Severus know what we’re doing.”

“But you encouraged me to learn from him.”

“Because he's utterly brilliant,” Lucius replied as if it were the most obvious point in the world. “I want you to learn everything you can from him, but you need to be on your guard around him too. Have you forgotten that he's the one who taught me that subtle method? Severus is dangerous and you need to be careful.”

“He's your friend, Lucius. How can you not trust him?” she asked with a frown.

“Apart from you or Narcissa, there is no one I trust more. I owe him more than I can possibly repay, but even I don't know where his loyalties lie. Given what happened after Li-...”

He paused, his throat working for a moment as though he wanted to say more. “It's not a risk I can take.”

Lucius’ admission caught her off guard momentarily. Hermione had known she was in select company, but he had never so blatantly professed such confidence in her. “He’s on our side though. Professor Dumbledore trusts him.”

“The Dark Lord trusts him too. As much as he’s capable of, anyway.”

Never once had she been afraid that Harry or Ron or any of her other friends might turn her over to the enemy. Acquaintances were a different story, and she understood taking precautions, she had done it herself with the D.A.’s charmed parchment, but Lucius didn't feel confident that he could even confide in someone he was close to. Hermione conceded that she was keeping her own secrets from her friends, but it was mostly for their own protection. Lucius was talking about something completely different.

“You know we were actually talking about Severus buggering me, not his questionable loyalties,” he added, redirecting the topic none too subtly. Lucius tugged her onto his lap, maneuvering her
easily to sit astride him. It was a move she recognized now for what it was: a distraction, and one
day she wouldn't let him get away with changing the subject so easily when he didn't like the
direction of the conversation. For now she allowed it, because it fit well with her plans for the
evening. She hadn't come to him to talk about who they could and couldn't trust. No, she had
come for something else.

Lucius was quick to turn on the seductive charm as he nibbled on her collarbone, kissing his way
up the side of her neck. He ground his pelvis against her slowly in a tantalizing tease before he
whispered, “It would seem that's something you have an interest in?”

She caught his lips in a bit of a frenzied kiss, rocking against him more forcefully to better seek the
kind of friction he was hinting at. Oh yes, it was absolutely a distraction technique, one he was
simply far too good at. It was almost difficult to stop what she had started, but the effort was well
worth it when she pulled back to stare down into eyes darkening with lust.

“Apparently I’m interested in several things that make me more than a little nervous,” Hermione
admitted quietly. Her hands splayed across his chest to steady herself on top of him.

“Do you, um, let men do that to you often?” She was a little bit breathless as she searched his eyes,
eager to hear his response. Hermione had never anticipated what Lucius might mean when he had
told her weeks earlier that he could submit, that he liked doing so. He clearly enjoyed sex with her.
She had never before considered the possibility that he might also enjoy having sex with men.

He reached up and touched her face gently with a chuckle. “That's a rather tactful way of asking
that question. No, I don't exclusively bottom. I like being on top as well. It just depends on the
wizard and it depends on my mood. And the circumstances as well, I suppose. I had experience.
Severus didn't. He needed to be the one on top. I didn’t.”

He ran his thumb across her lips, a mischievous glint in his eyes. “I could probably arrange a
performance if you're interested.”

Hermione exhaled slowly as her stomach clenched and she felt a shiver run through her body.
Lucius had been inside her mind more than once now. Was it possible that he had witnessed the
slew of fantasies which had fueled her shopping trip? Had he seen what she had purchased? Did he
approve if he had?

Her fingers curled against his chest, playing with the light dusting of honey-colored hair there. “I
didn't land in that memory by mistake, did I?”

Lucius didn't answer her, but from the way he guiltily looked off to the side and quirked his lips, it
was fairly obvious what his answer would have been.

“Was it to see how I would react?”

“Perhaps,” he smiled at her.

“Then why show me that memory? Why not one of the others? You know I have to sit through his
classes when I go back.”

“Well, considering how rough you like it, I thought that one might appeal to you the most.” Lucius
flipped them without warning, pinning her hands above her head and her hips with his own. He was
immovable when she playfully tested his hold, but he tightened his hands on her wrists anyway.

“Did you like the way he held me down?” He lowered himself to whisper in her ear, “Did you
imagine it was you?”
“Maybe,” she admitted, turning her head to nip at his jaw. Hermione couldn’t deny that watching him get shoved into the mattress had been a serious turn on for her. She saw it in her mind again even now.

Her legs locked around his waist, trapping him just as thoroughly as he had her pinned beneath him. The hard column of his cock throbbed against her stomach, and when Lucius tried to thrust against her she tightened her legs until he could barely move.

He drew back slightly to look down at her, releasing her wrists. He braced himself to keep his weight off her with a hand next to her head, and dragged his fingertips down her sternum though he avoided her breasts entirely.

“Correct me if I’m wrong, but you want the Lucius Malfoy I show the world: arrogant, self-assured, defiant. You want the one who would never be caught dead on his knees begging for mercy from a muggle-born, to do exactly that. Don’t you?” She nodded slowly, imagining that exact scenario.

You may have noticed with Severus that I was still the one in control.”

“Yes.” That had been abundantly clear to her even with such little experience on her part.

“If I was still in control, I never submitted, which I'm sure isn't quite what you want. You may prefer that I fight you, but for me that's atypical. I tend to give myself quite willingly.”

“So we're at an impasse then?” Hermione asked, her knees loosening against his sides slightly. After having considered it for so long, her disappointment was clearly evident.

“Not necessarily. After all,” he nuzzled against her neck briefly, causing her breathing to pick up the pace as his warm breath ghosted over her skin, “I do like the way you push me.”

He was lifting the hem of her shirt again planting a tender kiss against her belly. “And I'm curious to see what you’ll do.”

His teeth and tongue grazed over her ribs before he set his sights higher. “I believe we can reach a compromise; one that will leave us both sated.”

Lucius’ mouth latched onto her nipple, his tongue working against the stiffening peak. It would be so easy, Hermione thought to herself, to simply lie back and let him please her. Lucius was rapidly working himself into a frenzy with the way his hips moved against her. He would take her hard and fast if she wanted him to.

Her fingers threaded into his hair, curling against the back of his head, and she gave a vicious yank, hard enough to make him yelp.

She wasn't interested in hard and fast though it was sorely tempting. “I'm not really in the mood. That's not why I'm here tonight.”

She relished the look of utter confusion in his eyes. “I came to you tonight to learn.”

His brows rose, eyes widening, as he asked incredulously, “Now!?”

She nodded once, definitively, and his brows slashed downward into a frown.

“Tomorrow,” he countered.
“No. Now,” she insisted.

“It's late…”

“Yes, I know. Don't worry. It's nothing too strenuous. I think.”

His jaw clenched before he made the concerted effort to relax, acquiescing to her wishes. He must have been more worked up than she had thought. “What did you have in mind?”

“Well, first you should get off of me, and then I suggest you get comfortable.” Hermione pointed towards the head of his bed.

She unwound her legs from around him and he sat up slowly. Her gaze dropped lower, past his bare chest, and then much lower. He was clearly hard, his erection straining against the silk, a small, wet spot staining the front of his pants. She gave him a pointed look, one that clearly said, ‘Get on with it.’

Lucius kept a wary eye on her as he moved past her, still unsure what she had in mind for him. He reclined against the pile of pillows at his back, the confusion in his eyes just as evident, and he swallowed nervously as he waited.

Hermione tugged her shirt back into place, and then she slowly followed, scooting up next to him. She placed a hand on the top of his thigh, stroking lightly, and smiled at his sharply inhaled hiss.

She licked her bottom lip, catching it between her teeth before ducking her head in a way that was far more seductive than she realized. “I think you're a little overdressed for this lesson, Lucius.”

Lucius glared at her, though there was no malice behind his gaze, only curiosity as he tried to discern her game, and then he sighed rather dramatically before finally complying. His dressing gown was tossed unceremoniously towards the foot of the bed. When her eyes dropped down to his crotch expectantly, Lucius shoved the waistband down, freeing his erection. It waved wildly in the air at her, already rosy with an angry blush, and then he peeled his pants the rest of the way off before they ended up on the other end of the bed too.

“And what exactly am I meant to be teaching?” he asked as he leaned back, cupping his balls rather protectively if she wasn't mistaken. Was he actually concerned about what she might want to do him? Well, she supposed he had good reason to worry considering her history of attacking without warning.

“Well, I'm still a little tender.” Lucius opened his mouth to speak, “Don't apologize again. I was into it as much as you were,” and then he closed it again with a snap. “I'm just interested in watching tonight.”

His scowl deepened. “You've watched me wank before.”

“If you're talking about back when this whole thing started, your dungeon was incredibly dark, and I wasn't exactly in a position to appreciate the show. Besides, this is different.”

“How so?” he asked warily.

Hermione gave him a cheeky grin that made his stomach muscles tighten with, she assumed, apprehension given his behavior. She reached out, the backs of her fingers brushing across his knuckles, and then she drew a single finger slowly up the underside of his cock from the base all the way to the tip where it lay flat against his belly. It twitched, and Lucius held his breath, closing his eyes as he attempted to remain still under her gentle touch. It wasn't until she skimmed her hand
over his stomach and halted, her palm in the middle of his chest, that she spoke.

“You're not teaching me how you wank tonight, Lucius. You're teaching me how long you can last.”

His eyes snapped open, locking onto hers, searching them in bewilderment. “Are you serious?”

“What’s wrong? I thought you would be willing.” He made a face as he recognized his own word being thrown back at him. Hermione's fingertips stroked in slow circles where her hand lay, and Lucius shifted beneath the familiar caress.

“You're so good at pushing my buttons, Lucius. I want to get better at pushing yours.”

Hermione was watching his face so closely that she saw the exact moment his expression changed from mutinous rebellion to acquiescence. It was the last sentence that did him in. His head fell back against the pillows with a sigh, and he squeezed his balls, pushing up into his hand.

“You're already better at it than you think,” he murmured, eyes slitting open to look at her as his other hand closed around the shaft and began a lazy rhythm.

She gave him a skeptical look, “You actually know what that means?” and nudged apart his knees to settle on her belly between them, her chin propped up on her hands.

“It's a muggle phrase. I've invested in muggle technology since-” he paused, tilting his head thoughtfully, “-before you were born.”

“Will wonders never cease…”

Hermione said no more, choosing instead to watch what he did with interest for a while. It was a bit of a lie, though only a small one, to say that she hadn't been watching closely those many months ago. But his dungeon had been dark, and she hadn't been in a position to appreciate the show he had put on for her.

There were similarities, of course, but the differences between then and now led her to believe that his performance when he had first abducted her had indeed been a show. He had been on full display then, touching himself in such a way as to show off his assets, probably for intimidation purposes. Now he didn't really seem to notice or care that those assets were half covered by his hands.

He seemed to enjoy playing with his balls, she noted, which made sense considering the attention she had been encouraged to give them during their tryst at the school. His elegant fingers played with them, rolling them in the sac and pulling the skin of his scrotum taut. They had been fondled, teased, and toyed with, but he had yet to actually release them. The hand on his cock stroked fluidly, twisting up over the glans before diving back down. What surprised her was that it never quite stopped, remaining in constant in motion. She hadn't expected that. Hadn't really thought about it actually.

He was so obviously lost in the sensations that she almost hated to interrupt him. Almost. “So, how do you expect me to learn anything if you don't talk to me?”

He groaned and opened his eyes again, blinking away the haze. It seemed they had drifted shut without his knowledge. “What would you have me say?”

Hermione shrugged slightly. “You must be thinking about something. What is it?”
“I’m thinking about my hand,” he panted.

“Your hand?” she echoed, her brow furrowed. “What about it?”

“It’s disappointing.” Lucius ran his tongue across his lips, biting down into his full bottom lip momentarily. “You knocked on my door and I knew how tonight would end. It would end with my cock buried in your perfect cunt, not with my hand wrapped around it.”

As he spoke, the hand stroking himself began to speed up. His breath came faster. His grip changed from a loose fist to a stranglehold, and that previous rosy blush was now a throbbing, vibrant red. It looked painful, and then she recalled his words, ‘There’s no need to be quite so gentle’, whispered so long ago it might as well have been in another lifetime. Given the blissful look on his face, Lucius clearly didn't find it painful.

Despite his insistence back then, she had never handled him as roughly as he did himself now. It hadn't even crossed her mind until she had stumbled across that article and seen that photo, but if that were the case...

“I thought your bits were... delicate.” Boys roughhousing in Gryffindor Tower, and the misplaced strikes that went along with that, were a common occurrence.

Lucius chuckled and then groaned. “Yes and no. Some like a firm hand, and suitably aroused it can even feel exquisite, though not—”

He abruptly stopped talking and he stopped moving, every muscle in his body straining. His fingers and thumb strangled the base of his cock, a fat pearl of precum leaking slowly from the slit.

“No every man likes it,” he hissed at last when he had pulled himself back from the edge.

“You’ve done that before. Is that how you stop yourself?”

Lucius nodded wordlessly.

“Can you do it again?”

He sighed. “In a moment.”

Hermione could hear the smirk in her own voice. “Can you keep on doing it?”

He didn't seem surprised by the question. “What, until you decide otherwise?”

“Yeah… Can you?”

Lucius smiled slightly. “It depends how sadistic you are, but I can make the attempt.”

It took another minute or so for Lucius to begin again, and when he did it was with slow, deliberate movements that gradually increased in speed.

He still answered her questions readily.

Breathlessly.

Yes, he really would fuck another man for her if she wanted. Or let himself be fucked if she preferred.

Why? Because he enjoyed pleasing his partners. And he was a bit of an exhibitionist. She should
No, he’d never been with more than one at once.

No, he didn’t especially like pain, but a good, hard, satisfying fuck was something altogether different.

No, she wouldn’t be the first woman to bend him over, though it had been a while.

Yes, he was looking forward to the day she did.

By the time Lucius had pulled himself back from the brink of orgasm for the third time, his breathing was labored like a taxed racehorse, and he was positively drenched in sweat. The cock in his hands was throbbing, the head nearly purple with his need to come, and his fingers were slick with the copious amount of precum oozing down the shaft.

It took longer for him to recover each time; longer for him to start up the process again. He was two gentle strokes into his fifth attempt when he had to suddenly stop, clamping down desperately at the base as well as pinching his foreskin closed over the tip. For her part, Hermione had been attempting to gauge how far she was willing to push him, and nearly caved after his sudden stop. It was the look in his eyes that stopped her.

Lucius was looking at her, but he wasn’t quite looking at her. He looked high, like he had taken something, and when she reached out to touch his thigh, he shivered as though her touch was too much for his over-sensitized skin.

“Do you have another left in you?” It took him a second, and she thought he might not have actually heard her, but he nodded slowly through heavily-lidded eyes, though he apparently didn't trust himself enough yet to move.

Hermione pushed herself up to kneel between Lucius’ legs. She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, and then she gathered the glistening fluid on a finger drawn lightly up the shaft, holding her hand up to examine it in the light. Lucius watched her every movement with rapt attention, and his eyes tracked her finger as she brought it to his lips. His lips parted on a moan as she pushed her finger into his mouth.

He seemed to forget about his hands as he sucked on her finger, because they went slack while his tongue worked more enthusiastically. She suddenly had the urge to take him up on his offer of watching him with another man. The thought sent a rush of wetness to her already soaked knickers.

Hermione withdrew her fingers, leaning forward to brace herself above him. She could see in the eyes blinking owlishly at her that he was expecting her to lower herself onto his aching cock, and he released the head in anticipation of that event.

Lucius was so aroused, he was positively euphoric, and so responsive that when she ducked her head to kiss him, he surged upward suddenly, meeting her halfway. His slick fingers clutched desperately at her cheek. The smell of him, that intoxicating scent that was uniquely him, invaded her senses. She could feel him trying to guide her down on top of him, and reached between them to hold him off.

He made a muffled sound of surprise when her hand closed around him. And when Hermione broke the kiss to glance down, he fell back against the pillows, breath coming in harsh gasps. She squeezed with a little more pressure than she might normally have otherwise, and watched another fat bead of precum forced from the tip. Lucius was squeezing that spot at the base of his cock.
again, and she tapped her fingers lightly against the shaft making him buck upwards.

“Let go,” she whispered.

Lucius shook his head frantically.

“Let go, Lucius,” she insisted.

He swallowed and took several, deep, calming breaths, and then he let go. His hands shook as they dropped to his sides. Hermione pressed her lips to his, and then her hand moved, starting just as gently as he had, before the inevitable build towards his climax.

He was whimpering, hands fisted in the sheets, and she could tell by the impressive litany of cursing, that he was getting close. She was thinking about trying his technique to see if she could make him stop too. Her hand slowed as she contemplated it and his cursing turned to begging outright and she realized he was trying to wait for her permission.

“Hermione, please. I can't- I can't hold back…” His voice was strained with the effort.

“Then don't,” she answered.

Lucius seemed to let go all at once, thrusting up, and spurting over her hand and onto his stomach as he came. He was far quieter than she had thought he would be, coming with a shudder and a low grunt. He collapsed almost instantly into a boneless heap, and when she released him to caress his abdomen, her hand still covered in his spend, he didn't move a muscle.

Hermione couldn't tell if he had blacked out or simply fallen asleep. It didn't really matter. Either way, he was out. She made her way into the en suite bathroom, picked up a flannel, and ran it under the hot water. As she ran the tap, Hermione thought about how strange it was that she felt a sense of satisfaction even though she hadn't come. She hadn't even really wanted to, the low level of arousal coursing through her during the ‘lesson’ enough to satisfy her. Nearly. She did wish he had been more vocal when he climaxed. Given their history, she had expected it, but he had been rather subdued. There was always next time though. The next time he was at her mercy, she wanted him to come screaming, and would do what she could to insure that happened.

When she returned to the bedroom, Lucius was lying exactly as she had left him, his seed already drying on his skin. The sound he made at the first brush of the warm cloth was somewhere between a sigh and a moan. He stirred, barely, and cracked open a sleepy eye, but that was the extent of his movement.

Hermione pulled the sheet up to cover him once she finished her task. He was completely out again, but mumbled something she couldn't quite hear when she smoothed his damp hair away from his face.

“What was that, Lucius?” she asked, leaning down to place her ear next to his parted lips.

Hermione waited, but heard nothing save for a faint, nearly inaudible snoring, until he finally mumbled his reply, his breath a warm tickle against the shell of her ear.

“Thank you...,” she smiled and moved to draw back, and as she moved he added in a muted whisper, “…Mistress.”

Hermione looked at him in shock. His breathing had evened out again, and she didn't think he even realized what he had said. She touched his cheek lightly, smiling to herself, before pressing her lips to his in a lingering kiss goodnight.
His bedroom door clicked shut softly behind her, and she leaned back against the cool wooden surface marveling at how much a man she was supposed to hate with a fiery passion could so easily stir a different kind of passion in her.
Taskmaster

Chapter Notes

I know it been a while, but I kept going back and forth on certain aspects of this chapter. In the end, I decided to focus less on the specifics of techniques and focus more on the conversation around negotiation. There are plenty of stories that go deeply into techniques, and often the negotiation process gets overlooked. And everyone's mileage varies anyway. Plus, I wanted to spend more time on how he teaches her Occlumency and duelling, so I had to truncate something.

Having said that, he does agree to something that would absolutely be pre-negotiated and there's a reason for that. I wanted Lucius to be surprised. Much like Hermione, I like it, and this is fiction. But don't do that in real life!

Also, I love the way Lucius can tick Hermione off so easily. It can't all be sunshine and puppy dogs no matter how compatible they are. Enjoy!

Years.

If not decades.

These were the simple thoughts tripping around in Lucius’ head long before he ever opened his eyes. It had been years since he had last awoken feeling as pleasantly content. He did not wake in fear of whether or not the Dark Lord would finally breach the veil of his occluded thoughts and kill him as a traitor. He did not wake in fear of another ministry raid, one that would bear more fruit than any in the past. Most importantly, he didn't wake with the fear, as he did most mornings, that his mistakes would lead to the deaths of his wife and son. Instead, for once, Lucius woke with nothing more in his head than the thought of how good he actually felt.

He ached all over as though he had spent the better part of a day running through dueling drills, but he was bonelessly languid in ways such strenuous activity never left him.

It was an absolutely perfect way to wake up.

And then he finally opened his eyes, and the emptiness of the bed next to him, which had clearly not been slept in, dampened the perfection of his morning. Lucius blinked slowly and reached out, sliding his hand across the cool silk as if it would inexplicably deny what he knew to be true.

Hermione hadn't stayed. Everything had been perfect as far as he knew. Granted, he had been a little delirious with all the endorphins flooding his system, but he hadn't thought himself so far gone as to have misread her actions or the situation so badly. He couldn't remember saying or doing anything wrong.

So, then why hadn't she stayed?

Hermione was halfway down the hall when she heard the click of Lucius’ door, and he emerged from his rooms looking up at her in surprise once he'd caught sight of her. He walked towards her,
his steps sure enough, but there was a tinge of uneasiness in his eyes, almost as if he were approaching a dangerous animal, gauging her reaction in case she might attack. She couldn't imagine why. He hadn't done anything wrong. He-

A thought clicked into place in her brain in light of their recent encounters. It was possible, likely probable, that he thought he had. Hermione would have rolled her eyes at the notion if he hadn't been looking right at her with that unmistakable tinge of uneasiness reflected in his own.

Mustered some of her Gryffindor bravery to stave off the apology she suspected was coming, Hermione grasped the front of his shirt, and stood up on her toes as she pulled him forward. She pressed her lips to his, her tongue running across his lower lip in the same way she liked him to do to her, and only pulled back once he responded and she felt the play of his fingers on her hip pulling her closer to him.

“Thank you,” she murmured, reaching up to caress his cheek. “I think I learned quite a bit last night.”

“It was my pleasure,” he replied, and then he realized what he had said with a small shake of his head, and gave her a wry grin. “I mean you're welcome. Was the evening satisfactory? You didn't stay.”

So that's what was making him uneasy; the thought that there might have been a reason that she hadn't remained. He apparently didn't quite know where they stood and needed assurances that everything was okay between them. “Satisfactory is a rather poor description.”

Hermione linked her arm in his, pressing into his side. “But I had a lot to process and I couldn't do that with you shaking down the walls.”

He favored her with a comically wounded look, “I can assure you that I don't snore,” but let her begin to lead him down the hall nonetheless.

“Well, how would you know,” she countered, “if you're the one asleep?”

Lucius thought about it for a moment, his brow furrowed as they walked.

“I'm joking of course. It's barely noticeable… but you definitely snore.” She grinned at him and he finally relaxed enough to laugh, just a short huff, but it was something. They were each silent for a time, until Hermione shot one too many sidelong glances at the wall next to her.

“What in Merlin's name are you looking at? The portraits?” he asked, following the direction of her gaze.

“Mmhmm.”

“They're all ancestors. Every Malfoy has a portrait in the manor,” he replied automatically.

Hermione did roll her eyes at his matter of fact statement. “Yes, I gathered as much. They don't-they've never said anything to me. I mean I can tell some of them want to, but…”

“No. You expected them to?” he asked with a frown.

“Well, Walburga Black’s portrait hangs in Grimmauld Place and she's rather unpleasant.”

Lucius laughed aloud this time, a rich, chuckle of genuine amusement. “Walburga… say no more. I had the dubious honor of having to interact with her when she was alive. I haven't thought about
her in years, but I imagine she's even more... unpleasant now.”

He looked at her meaningfully. “Especially towards you.”

“We have to keep her covered most of the time.” Hermione admitted. She glanced around the hall again. “None of the portraits here have... espoused the same philosophies.”

“Nor would they,” Lucius replied, looking around them as well. “The master of Malfoy Manor has always had final say regarding what occurs under this roof.”

Hermione gave him a curious look, not quite sure what he could mean. He shrugged his shoulders lightly. “I've forbidden it.”

“Really?” she asked with a little smile, and a flutter in her stomach. It was a minor yet unexpectedly gallant gesture from him that she hadn't anticipated.

“Yes, of course. You're helping me protect this family. The least they can do is hold their tongues if they are incapable of being civil.” With that declaration, Lucius shot a withering glare over the top of her head at one of the occupants of the many portraits lining the wall behind her.

The man in question had a rather unremarkable build, barrel-chested and square, and for all that he looked like Lucius, the man didn't have the same elegance in his features, though that could possibly have been due to the scowl on his face as he looked at her. There was little question that he would tell her exactly what he thought of her were he permitted to do so. It was easy to see his cruelty reflected in his gaze, and easier to imagine him as the type of man Lucius had described before, provided she had correctly identified him, and she doubted that she was wrong.

And then she recalled the kiss they had just shared, the one that entirely decent, that she had initiated right out in the open in front of this terrible man. Her cheeks reddened and she ducked her head. Lucius noticed immediately, and pulled her into his side.

“Forget about him. He's just a painting,” Lucius stated with conviction though it sounded like he might be trying to convince himself as well. He looked down at her and grinned impishly. “You've a full day ahead. Occlumency. Duelling. You should be focused on that, because I assure you it doesn't get easier.”

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Lucius was right. His lessons didn't get easier. It didn't seem like she was making any headway at all, and it was frustrating beyond belief. She felt like an utter failure which made it worse because failure wasn't something she was used to. By the time he called a halt to her lesson, she had yet to succeed even once or even remotely come close to success. Hermione was beginning to think Lucius’ method wouldn't work for her after all. Clearly she was going to have to rethink it, and come up with her own strategy. With so much riding on her ability to learn to occlude her thoughts, coming up with something that worked soon was a necessity.

As she readjusted the tunic at her throat for the umpteenth time, Hermione set aside her frustration with her morning lesson so that she could concentrate on the current one. She was more optimistic about this one. The D.A. meetings did much to boost her confidence. Duelling, unlike Occlumency, was at least something she was familiar with.

The grand duelling room of Malfoy Manor looked remarkably similar to the one in the Room of Requirement, though it was obviously much more lavishly furnished. There were also the scorch marks liberally coating the walls, ceiling, and floor from hundreds of years of use. She gripped her
wand more tightly, somewhat nervous about what was to come.

“What experience do you have with duelling?” Lucius asked as he repositioned a target dummy for what was probably the tenth time. She didn’t know if there was a reason he needed it to be placed in such an exact way or if it was just some quirk of his. He had been oddly particular as he worked to set up the room, something she had noted with interest he had not left up to his house elves.

“Aside from what you saw in my mind, which I really can’t talk about by the way-”

“Yes, not your secret. I know,” he cut in, brushing nonexistent dust from the dummy’s shoulder.

“No, I mean that I may have woven a failsafe spell into a piece of parchment, and… actually I don’t think I should say anymore.”

Lucius stopped what he was doing for a moment, and turned to looked at her. He got a faraway look in his eyes, like he was searching his memory for something, and then he smiled slyly at her, and she knew that he must have remembered which parchment she meant.

“What spell was it? Something suitably nasty?”

“Well I'm not sure about that, but it doesn't have a name.”

His grin grew wider at her admission. “Well done,” he murmured with obvious pride.

“I'll refrain from asking you about it again then,” he replied, leaving the dummy alone at last, and sauntering towards her with deliberate steps, almost like he were measuring the distance.

“Thank you. Anyway, aside from that, there was duelling club which started second year.”

“And who taught that?” Lucius asked with interest.

“Professor Snape and… Gilderoy Lockhart.”

Lucius smirked and Hermione could tell he was trying to hold back his laughter. “I notice you didn’t afford your former professor the same courtesy you gave Severus.”

“The fraud doesn’t deserve it,” she hissed darkly. The entire Lockhart situation still angered her. The way she had acted regarding the man...

“I seem to recall quite a different reaction on your part in the past. At his book signing.” And now Lucius was bringing it up again, drawing attention to her shameful infatuation all those years ago.

Hermione glared at Lucius, which only made him outright snicker at her before dropping the subject. “Severus is an admirable duellist. You’re lucky to have been taught by him. Who took over for his… colleague?”

“Professor Flitwick.” Lucius nodded, stepping around behind her. She turned her head to follow him, but he forced her back around to face forward again.

“I would imagine Minerva was busy. Ravenclaws tend to cause far less trouble than you rowdy Gryffindors.”

“I doubt that.”

“Well they don't tend to get caught at the least.” And she had to concede his point. He moved her hair off her neck, and she was just about to ask what he was doing when she felt his finger slip into
the collar of her tunic, and test the amount of play between her skin and the leather.

His touch was perfunctory, his finger remaining only briefly before moving on to the buckles laced down her spine. He checked each one in the same meticulous way, his dexterous fingers tightening and loosening the straps until he was satisfied.

“Is this really necessary?” she grunted as he pulled one in particular nearly corset tight.

“The tunic needs to move with you, so it needs to be fitted.” His voice was a little low, a little rough. Clearly he was not unaffected by their intimate proximity no matter how clinically detached his touch. Or maybe it was just her imagination that many of their interactions seemed to have an electrically charged quality to them. Maybe Lucius didn’t feel the same thrum of want in her slightest touch the way she felt it in his.

“You know I don't think people normally have time for this sort of preparation, and we didn't use them in duelling club.”

“One would hope that aurors normally wouldn't be as mismatched as we two,” Lucius leaned down to murmur in her ear, “and I'm not one of your professors. Hogwarts has rules they adhere to. This room does as well: full contact only.”

She did turn to look at him then, her unease screaming inside her.

“Don't look so alarmed.” He took a step back and stood off to her side.

“Nonlethal only, of course. I want you to learn from your mistakes, not die from them. Now then,” and he tapped his cane on the stone floor, “shall we find out what I'm working with? Draw and hold.”

“Which spell should I use?”

“None for now.” He didn't elaborate further, and with a little shrug, Hermione slipped her wand from its holster.

She did as he instructed, holding her precarious stance, as she waited for his response. When none came she chanced a glance out of the corner of her eye. Lucius wasn't even looking her way.

He was frowning at the target dummy instead.

“Where exactly were you aiming?”

“You didn't say anything about-” He gave her a look of incredulity, head tilted as if to ask if she were serious. “Shall I do it again then?”

“Yes. Please do. After all I did go through all the trouble of setting that up for you,” and he inclined his head in the direction of the dummy.

Hermione clenched her teeth in response, marveling inwardly at his clipped tone. Lucius’ reply had sounded snarky, but the words had rolled off his tongue so nonchalantly, and he had immediately looked back in the direction of the dummy expectantly, that she didn't think it had even been intentional.

“You're kind of an arse sometimes,” she muttered, and then focused on the dummy again.

“Oh really?” The amusement in his tone truly irritated her.
“Yeah, really. I don't think that actually comes as much of a shock to you.” This time though, she did aim, and watched a small, bluish white circle appear on the dummy between collarbone and shoulder joint. The ones in the Room of Requirement weren't nearly so fancy, but then they were in the nicest duelling room she had ever seen.

Lucius nodded to himself, and walked slowly towards the dummy to inspect it more closely. He looked back at her, almost as an afterthought.

“Is this where you were aiming?” he asked, fingering the fading circle, eyes never leaving her form.

She started to lower her wand, and froze when he spoke again. “I didn't say to move. We're not quite finished yet. Your answer?”

“I was aiming for the center,” she huffed indignantly.

“Mmm.” He dropped his hand to his side.

“Well, you'll be hitting it consistently by the time you leave.” He seemed awfully sure of that assertion. Hermione hoped he was right.

Lucius walked back towards her, just as slowly as he had walked away. She really wished he would hurry up, because she really wanted to lower her wand arm, and-

“I should think the ache setting up in that right calf is growing unbearable right about now. Wouldn't you say?”

He stopped at her shoulder looking down at her, his eyebrow arched and head tilted quizzically. How in Merlin's name-

“And now between your shoulders, and deep in your lower back as well. Duelling is as much about your stance and how you hold yourself as what kind of spell you cast.”

Lucius broke eye contact, looking down, and Hermione felt the tip of his cane come to rest against the instep of her foot.

“Your stance is atrocious and I'm not saying that to be an arse.” His gentle words staved off the fire brewing inside her, but only just. It was still smouldering in any case.

He spun his cane in hand without preamble, grasping it the wrong way round. It pressed against her foot again, and then he slowly drew the head up the length of her aching leg, pressing gently on her knee as he spoke. “You're too far forward. It throws you off balance.”

Then he continued upward, and the way he slid his cane against her felt almost sensual, despite his businesslike demeanor. If she didn't already know better, she would have thought he was teasing her. The cold metal rested against the skin of her wrist, caressing ever so slightly.

“And it's a wand, not a sword. You're casting a spell, not stabbing someone.”

He moved the snake head once more, pressing it firmly into her left shoulder. “A halfway competent duelist would have shrugged off your attempt, and then they would have hit you right here.”

Lucius pushed on her shoulder for emphasis. Hermione's stomach muscles tightened as she caught herself, managing to remain upright though she wobbled precariously before she did. “You would
either be spun about completely and left exposed or knocked flat on your arse. Either option is, obviously, something you want to avoid.”

Quite the understatement really, one she couldn’t argue with despite how hacked off she still was at his taciturn behavior. And she had thought all her prior practice would make it easier somehow.

“It sounds like we have a lot of work to do then,” she conceded.

He inclined his head in agreement. “I suppose you were right earlier.”

“About?”

He took a step closer, fingers running along the collar of her tunic. “About this being necessary. Today anyway. Probably tomorrow as well.”

“Think you're up for such a daunting challenge?”

Lucius smiled at her, a rare genuine smile that lacked any type of snarky amusement behind it. It was unguarded. Affectionate. Much like the smile he had bestowed upon her the previous night when he had opened his door to find her standing before it.

It wasn't until he spoke, and then stepped back dropping his hand that she realized his fingers had remained on her neck, stroking lightly through the protective leather.

“By the time I'm through with you, you'll at least be halfway competent.”

Hermione felt a flutter in her lower belly. There was something in his voice, in the way he looked at her like he wanted to kiss her... She didn't think he was speaking entirely about the duelling lessons and it made the promise of what was to come all the more enticing a prospect.

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By the time he allowed her to stop for the day, Hermione was certain her hand was going to fall off at the wrist, and that her legs were made of jelly. Lucius was, surprisingly, even more of an exacting taskmaster than Professor Snape. It seemed that drive for excellence was one of the things they had in common.

Professor Snape certainly didn't go easy on her during her private lessons, but she could only describe her duelling lesson with Lucius as grueling; both mentally and physically taxing. That meticulous behavior she had noted early on was reflected in his teaching method. He demanded excellence, pushed her toward it, and he was as likely to offer praise for a job well done as he was to smack her with his cane and succinctly inform her of her shortcomings. She had collected far more bruises than compliments.

The first time he had done it, she had turned her considerable ire on him. He had remained unperturbed, and simply asked if she would prefer a stinging hex instead. The question had stunned her speechless, and he had ordered her to begin her progression again from the top before she could think up a suitable protest.

Now Hermione practically dragged herself into the dining room and sank gratefully into her chair; the same one Lucius had dumped her into so long ago when he had carried her up from his dungeon. She hadn’t thought she could ever feel more exhausted than she had on that day, but after a full day of Occlumency training and then her duelling lesson, she was mentally and physically worn out. Her eyes were drooping as Lucius slid back into his own chair. There was a weariness evident in his shoulders, but he didn’t look anywhere near as tired as she felt.
Her eyes fell to the table, specifically his glass of firewhiskey within easy reach of her left hand, and she reached for it without a moment's pause. The hot bath had helped somewhat. Perhaps the whiskey would finish numbing her so that she could sleep and do it all over again the next day. It was halfway to her lips when Lucius deftly plucked it from her hand and set it on the other side of the table out of her reach.

Her hand hung in mid air, clenching into a fist momentarily before falling back to the table. “Why not?”

Lucius cast a sidelong glance at her. “Turning into a bit of a lush, are we?”

Rather than answer, Hermione picked up her fork and stabbed a potato on her plate with enough force to make the tines ring. He was laughing at her, well he wasn't actually, but she could hear it in his voice, and it kind of made her hope she had chipped his fancy china.

“I'll let you have it, but first we need to talk, and I want you clear headed for that.”

“Are we planning to discuss your teaching methods then?” She popped the potato into her mouth, gnashing it viciously.

Lucius placed his napkin in his lap, and picked up his own knife and fork, cutting delicately into his roasted chicken. He lifted the morsel to his lips, and paused to speak before taking a bite.

“You seem irritated.”

She choked on her potato. Tears pricked at her eyes as she beat her chest to clear the blockage and fumbled for her glass of water.

Hermione didn't know if it was what he said or the innocuous way he said it, as if he were merely flipping through The Prophet and making note of a minor article on page six; something like, “Oh, I see Fortescue’s has a new flavor.” Whatever the reason, the effect was her temper finally boiling over after she had managed the admirable feat of keeping it in check all afternoon.

She jabbed threateningly with her fork in the direction of the blurry blob of Lucius Malfoy-shaped color. “I'm black and blue, you arse!”

“Still?” he asked with concern. “You should have said something earlier. I could have healed—”

“That's not the bloody point! You didn't tell me that was going to be part of it.”

“Oh. Well, you agreed to the lessons. I just assumed...” The confusion in his eyes, the concern in his voice, was palpable. “Am I to take it that you disliked the physical aspect of the lesson?”

“Yes,” she hissed. How could he not have realized?

“Well then, why didn't you ask me to stop?”

Hermione stopped short on an indrawn breath. Why hadn't she? She sat there, her mouth opening and closing repeatedly as she searched for the answer to the question. The truth was that beyond that initial indignation the first time he had struck her, it hadn't really crossed her mind to object. She had grit her teeth and borne it and just gone along with it assuming it was par for the course, much like his unusual method of teaching her Occlumency.

Lucius set his utensils down, clearing his throat slightly to draw her attention.
"Considering the limited amount of time we have, I thought a quick and dirty lesson would be most memorable, and I didn't want to bring sex into the equation because I didn't want you to associate it with."

His hand covered her own where it still lay limply on the table with her shock, squeezing gently. Hermione pulled her hand away stiffly. He didn't move his hand, but he also didn't try to touch her again.

“Gaining or giving consent and knowing your limits. I'm sure you've read about both in your... research, but being caught up in the moment can be overwhelming. If you learn nothing else from me, I want you to at least have learned those.”

Consent. It was all about... Because of... She finally looked at him, the earnest expression on his face only partially hidden behind his facade. “You did that because of what I did to you at Hogwarts?” she asked incredulously.

He scoffed dismissively. “No, of course, not. Your breach of etiquette might have angered someone else but I actually rather enjoyed it. I told you I’m not really much of a dominant. Top might be more accurate. Most of the time anyway. And contrary to what you might believe at this point, I’m not actually one of those abusive instructors, so your shins are safe from here on out.”

Hermione stared in stunned amazement as he picked up his fork again and took another bite, completely at ease with the conversation. “What in Godric’s name is wrong with you?”

He looked up, swallowing, and then dabbed at the corner of his mouth delicately. “I'm not sure I take your meaning.”

Clearly from the curious expression on his face, he truly didn’t follow. In his mind, his teaching moment, or whatever he wanted to call it, was perfectly acceptable, something he had already put behind him. Hermione opened her mouth, ready to rage at him, and stopped herself short, a thought coming to mind. “Let me ask you a question. When you gave me your advice regarding potions ingredients, did you know how Professor Snape was going to react?”

Lucius suppressed the sly grin that threatened to cross his face. Oh, the bastard definitely knew! “How did he react?” he questioned innocently, sipping at his whiskey.

“Well,” she drawled, “he insinuated that I was cheating, gave me detention so that I could prove that I wasn’t, and now I have a weekly independent potions lesson with him.”

She could tell that he was hiding a smirk behind his glass. Her tone was not amused. “I don’t find it as humorous as you. At first I thought he was going to kill me, and then I thought all my classmates were going to kill me.”

His brows drew together in confusion as his gaze fell on her once again. “Classmates? What do they have to do with it?”

“He was going to punish the lot of us if my potion had been just slightly off. He hasn't been pleasant this year,” she rolled her eyes, adding, “not that he's ever truly been pleasant in the past.”

He smiled broadly, looking pleased at her answer. “So, it passed Severus’ rather stringent standards then?”

She was speechless for a moment.

“Yes, he was rather pleased,” Hermione answered, exasperated that he had managed to focus on
exactly the wrong part of her statement.

“Well then I don’t see what the problem is,” he replied with a shrug. “I thought you would have considered it a great honor to learn from Severus. Is he not as good as I said?”

“Yes, he is, and it is a great honor. That’s not the issue. The issue is you being so damned duplicitous and cryptic all the time. This business with Professor Snape, the amulet, the meeting at school, I mean that one I get, but your lesson …” His blank expression didn't change and Hermione scrubbed her hand over her face in frustration. “You don't see anything wrong with that at all? That isn't normal behavior, Lucius.”

He scoffed. “Of course, it's normal.” And then he asked, as if he were making a most obvious point, “You do realize that I’m a Malfoy and a Slytherin?”

“This is exactly the bloody reason our houses don’t get along,” she muttered, throwing her hands up.

He laughed, waving a hand dismissively before responding. “The reason our houses don’t get along is because they’re too bloody much alike. Both like to break the rules. The approach is what’s different. It’s just that one is straightforward, and the other is… duplicitous. You don't survive in pureblood society otherwise.”

He paused a beat as if considering her words, and then he looked at her, truly looked at her. “I make no promises, but if it means that much to you, I'll try to make an effort to be more forthcoming in the future. Within reason, that is. Now,” he gestured to her nearly untouched meal, “eat. You’ll need your strength for tomorrow, and there’s still something I want to show you this evening.”

Her head dropped into her hand, fingers rubbing at her temples where she felt a headache beginning to grow. Why did he have to be so frustratingly obtuse? Really, she knew the answer, not that it helped. It was what he knew. For all that Lucius was an expert in manipulation and could accurately anticipate what a person might do, he had no idea why that person might actually make the choices they did.

She heard the scrape of his chair, and paid it no mind. It wasn't until he brushed her hair aside, and pressed his lips to the nape of her neck that she dropped her hand from her face with a start. She found herself confronted by his outstretched hand in front of her offering the last of his drink; enough to relax her, but not enough to get her drunk.

Hermione took the glass from him, lifting it slowly to her lips as she felt both of his hands land lightly on her shoulders. She released a sigh as his fingers went to work, and she sipped at the amber liquid, relishing the burn and the warmth that bloomed in her chest as Lucius methodically worked the tension from her shoulders. Her free hand came up, covering his, and she held her breath, wondering what he would do.

His fingers linked in hers for the span of several heartbeats, and then he brought her knuckles to his lips before letting her hand go to continue his work. Her eyes misted over at the same time a knot coiled in the pit of her stomach. Lucius irritated her so easily, and in the next moment he stole her breath. How could he be so frustratingly clueless in the basics of human decency, and yet so utterly sweet and perfect, reacting in exactly the right way? Hermione wished she had the answer to that question.

If she knew the answer to that question it might not be as easy to... like him as much as she did.
She could feel his eyes on her as she walked around the room, watching her avidly though he seemed content to simply observe. It was actually an entire suite of rooms filled nearly to bursting with all manner of implements and furniture. She recognized several of the large pieces from Dervish & Banges, though the small shop had nothing on Lucius’ extensive collection.

“What are you thinking?” Lucius asked, his voice pitched low as if he didn't wish to disturb her.

Hermione pulled open a drawer filled with assorted clips and clamps. Some looked benign while others looked downright excruciating. She closed it, and open the one below it, and had no idea what she was looking at.

“I'm thinking I have no idea where to even begin.”

Lucius came up behind her, his hand a soothing weight in the middle of her back, pushing the drawer closed until it clicked audibly in the quiet room. “Then maybe we should start with what you like.”

He leaned his hip on the edge of the dresser, turning to face her, his arms crossed over his chest.

“Has this room always been here?” It was, to say the least, an altogether strange addition to a family wing, only a few doors down from Lucius’ master bedroom in fact.

“No, it's been in storage. The playroom normally resides on the second floor. I had it moved here for convenience.”

“What were those things?”

“Sounding rods.” He gauged her reaction to judge whether or not he needed to elaborate.

It wasn’t necessary. She hadn't actually seen one, but had come across the term in her reading.

“You've used them?”

Lucius nodded slightly. “Can't say I'm all that much of a fan.”

“So what are you a fan of then?”

A tilt of his head and narrowing of the eyes. “I thought we were talking about you…”

Hermione crossed her arms in front of herself as well, arching an eyebrow at him, and giving him a pointed look. “I thought this was a mutual sharing session. I know what you’re like on top. It might help me articulate if I knew what you were like on the other side.”

Lucius shook his head slightly. “You’re just as stubborn…,” but he didn’t finish whatever he was going to say.

“Blindfolds. Rope, silk specifically though other kinds have their uses. I’ve already told you that I’m an exhibitionist.” Hermione nodded.

“I like being bossed around, made to do things. It’s... freeing, having to do nothing more than react, nothing more than to please.”

“So,” Hermione drawled, thinking carefully, trying to link his confession back to things she had come across in her research, “if I told you to give me a massage you'd like that?” His eyes lit up and she filed the information away.
“And if I made you crawl on your knees?” He swallowed audibly.

Hermione glanced at the wall next to them. “What about those?”

His eyes didn't leave hers. “I take it you have an interest in flogging me.”

She felt her cheeks grow hot. “It depends on which flogger you’re interested in. As you can see, there are more than just a few types.”

She couldn't help how her eyes drifted back to the wall. “So, what are your limits?”

“It mostly has to do with pain. There’s a fine line, of course, where pain and pleasure are one and the same, but…,” he paused to wet his lips. “Branding. Whips. I especially hate whips. Being beaten and bruised. Bruises on their own are fine, you’ve given me a few, but I don’t like taking a beating.”

He lowered his head, his loose hair cascading down to partially cover his face, and then he shook himself from whatever memories he had fallen into, tucking his hair back behind his ear as he looked up at her.

“And absolutely no human waste either.” Lucius cleared his throat, “Now enough about me. Let’s hear about you, and all the twisted little things that giant brain of yours has come up with.”

“Bottom?” she asked, moving over to a cabinet this time to peer inside.

“If that's where you want to start. You can skip what I’m already familiar with.”

“Remind me. What do you think you're familiar with?” she grinned cheekily at him.

His eyes narrowed a fraction at the challenge in her voice. “You think I don't remember?”

The naked hunger on his face made her stomach flop, a tingle of want racing down her spine.

“There are three things that stand out in my memory, and they all revolve around one concept: force. You loved the roleplaying, but even more than that, you loved being forced to your knees. I have two distinct memories of that. And I remember the way you whimpered so deliciously when I shoved you backwards over that desk.”

Lucius licked his lips before continuing, and Hermione could feel her heart speed up.

“And then after you bit me…” Hermione watched a shudder roll through his body.

“I don't know that I've ever seen anyone gagging for cock quite like that. Do you remember how wet you were? How desperate to have me inside you? I remember.”

Lucius grinned suggestively, his gaze travelling down her body before he met her eyes again. “I’d wager your knickers are soaked clear through at the memory alone.”

The smirk on his face didn't waver as he hooked a thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the door. “There's a desk in my study if you'd care for a repeat.”

Hermione returned his suggestive look with a smirk of her own, but didn't acknowledge the offer.

“Rope sounds fun,” she answered instead.

Her hand lingered on the back of a wooden chair as she prowled around the room. There were
leather cuffs on the armrests and for the ankles as well. She found it fascinating, and he would look so good in it...

She looked up to find him watching her. “Spanking too, but if you think I’m going to call you ‘Sir’ and thank you, you’re delusional.”

Lucius’ smile only grew wider at her confirmation of his earlier assessment. She did like the fight. “I think we can work something out. Anything else?”

“The flogger,” she ducked her head, and pointed sheepishly at a different section of the wall, “and that.”

His eyes went wide and his jaw dropped when he saw what she was pointing at. “Uh, you- you want the black snake? I really don't think you'll like that.”

“No, I don't think so either.”

“Then why?” His voice was filled with disbelief.

“Well,” she began, searching for the right words, “it intrigues me, and I don't know that I don't like it, so I want to know what it feels like, so that I know for sure. Does that make sense to you?”

He shook his head. “Not really, but I'll think about it.”

“You would?” Her surprise was evident.

He nodded. “It seems you've given it some thought, and I doubt it would take more than one lash anyway.”

“We'll see. As for limits? I agree about the waste. I have no interest in that. There are probably more I'm just not sure.”

“But you'll tell me?”

“Yes.”

“And what about topping?”

“I think it's where we differ the most.”

“Yes, and I said we'd compromise. So, tell me.”

Hermione worried her lower lip, her foot tapping nervously.

Lucius sighed. “I already know how you want me act, remember? A little resistance. All you have to do is tell me what you want to do to me.”

“I want to hit you,” she blurted out, and thought she might be sick to her stomach with her nervousness.

His eyes widened momentarily before he regained control.

“Closed fist or open hand?” he inquired politely, sounding as if the question was completely normal.

Hermione's jaw went slack. “You said you didn't like-”
“I agreed to teach you, so I'm gathering information. I won't turn you down without at least knowing what you have in mind.”

“Hand,” she admitted.

“Because I'm an arrogant bastard or is there another reason?”

“No that’s… I have this whole scenario in my head.”

“About putting me in my place?”

“Yeah. I have it written down,” in detail in the notebook stuffed into her trunk. In fact, that particular scenario was the most detailed fantasy in the entire book. She’d gotten off to the thought more than once.

“What else?”

“Well, you seem to like being rough on your bits.”

“So, naturally you feel inclined to torture them.”

“Only a little,” she replied defensively. “And then there's the buggering, but…”

“Having second thoughts?” The naked disappointment in his voice was something she hadn’t expected.

“No, not at all. There’s just this idea I had that I think you’ll like, but I just kind of wanted it to be a secret.”

When Lucius remained silent, Hermione was afraid she had made a mistake. His face was a stoic mask, and she had no idea what he was thinking.

“Look, I know I shouldn't be springing anything on you. I get that now. It's just that, that look you get in your eyes when you're surprised is-”

“It's that important, is it?” he asked quietly.

Hermione bit into her bottom lip worriedly. “You just don't seem like the kind of man who's surprised often.”

“With you it seems to be a regular occurrence,” he murmured.

She waited, watching him. His hair had once again fallen loose to cover his face. He had turned slightly away from her, and she couldn’t help but think that he was shutting her out. She couldn’t see his face. The only thing she had to go on was the gentle rise and fall of his chest. Hermione, knew she shouldn’t have said anything.

Lucius’ voice was clear with no discernible hesitation as he finally spoke. “Provided we hash out the rest of it, I'll allow it.”

“You will?” she breathed in disbelief.

He nodded. “The likelihood of anyone else you might play with indulging you is slim, and I seem to have this undeniable weakness for your surprises.”

He pushed himself off the dresser and held out his hand to her, looking at her expectantly.
Hermione looked from his eyes to his outstretched hand and back, and drifted towards him to take it. He pulled her against him, looking for all the world like he was going to kiss her. Her lips parted slightly of their own volition, a clear invitation for him to continue.

She felt his arm wind around her waist, and then suddenly he was steering her towards the door. “On that note, why don't we call it a night?”

What? That wasn't what she had in mind. “We're not—”

“Alcohol and activities of the kind you're looking to explore don't mix. Always remember that. Do you want someone who has been drinking to try and whip you with that?” and his head jerked in the direction of the black snake whip that had caught her eye.

Hermione shook her head quickly. No, that would certainly be a terrible idea.

Lucius pulled her closer into his side, his lips pressing against the soft skin of her neck, just below her ear.

“Though I could probably be convinced to give you a massage,” he whispered suggestively.

“It’s the least I could do after the terrible day you’ve had…”

The reminder of his ill treatment during her duelling lesson irked her nearly enough to make her lose interest in the idea, but the memory of the way his hands had so expertly worked the stiff muscles in her shoulders overrode her ire at him. Yes. A massage did sound delightful, and it was the least he could do after all.
In accordance with his promise, Hermione hadn’t picked up a single bruise over the course of the next few days, though not because she had improved so drastically in that time. At one point, she had actually thought Lucius was going to tear out all that beautiful hair she was so obsessed with in his frustration with her progress.

In retrospect, it was most assuredly their combined mutual frustration at her lack of anything resembling real progress, in either duelling or Occlumency, which had brought the argument to a head.

It was their third lesson, and the hands covering his face or rubbing at the back of his neck had steadily inched higher into his hairline over the course of about an hour until he had finally snapped, “Stop fucking lunging!”

“I’m not lunging,” she replied testily, eyebrows slashed together in fury at his tone.

“Yes, you bloody well are!” And then he had scrubbed a hand over his face with a groan.

“Well, you don’t have to yell,” she had ground out through clenched teeth, clutching her wand so tightly she thought she might break it.

He was pacing, not saying a word though his body language screamed out loud everything he was trying to hold back, until he turned to her and suddenly burst out, “It’s just dancing for fuck’s sake. It’s not that hard!”

“Well, I haven't danced since last year's Yule Ball, so maybe for some of us, it isn't so easy,” she had shot back with a mutinous glare.

Lucius had only responded with a sullen scowl of his own, and Hermione had stormed from the room without another word, the door banging off the wall in her wake.

It had been their shortest lesson of all, and afterward she had successfully avoided him for the rest of the afternoon. Her luck ran out that evening. He had tried to move past the argument at dinner, pretending that everything was fine, laying that unmistakable charm of his on so thick she thought she might choke on it. His displeasure with the way she ignored his attempts was obvious.

She had eaten her meal quickly, and had not uttered a single word to him throughout despite all his talking. It had only taken her two steps once she had risen from her chair for him to stop her in her
tracks momentarily with the words, “I apologize,” but they were perfunctory, lacking inflection and more importantly, sincerity.

She had squared her shoulders and simply continued on her way.

Hermione's head dropped back to rest against the curved porcelain of the bathtub with a languid sigh. She had spent some time after dinner revising ancient runes, letting go of much of her anger in the process. Now, as she dragged her fingers through the disappearing bubbles, and cupped her palm to catch a handful of water, she would describe her mood as mildly irritated.

It wasn’t the argument that bothered her. Those things happened. It was what came after that gave her pause. She understood Lucius’ behavior in the academic sense. It was learned. It had probably been modeled for him early on. He was probably used to the people in his social circles accepting his hollow apologies decorously, thanking him profusely for bestowing them upon them. They had probably worked in his favor in the past so well that he most likely saw no reason to change his approach now.

It really shouldn't have come as a surprise to her. She had simply forgotten what he was. Lucius was not only Slytherin, he was a pure-blood as well. How could she have forgotten that they came from two different worlds?

So, she may have understood where his behavior was coming from, but that didn't mean she was interested in putting up with it, certainly not when she knew for a fact that he was entirely capable of rendering a genuine apology. The remorse in not only his voice, but in his eyes and body as well, was not feigned, and was readily offered if he thought for a moment he had stepped out of line physically. Why couldn't he be that way in his everyday interactions? What was it that made sex different in his eyes?

The water slipped through her fingers to run down her forearm, and drip from her elbow back into the tub from whence it came, and her eyes drifted closed with another deep sigh.

As much as Lucius’ behavior irritated her, it was something she was going to have to come to terms with on her own if she chose to continue their arrangement. She was reminded of something her mother had told her, years ago during the dreaded and mortifying ‘talk’. It had just been a strange piece of advice then, one she didn't really understand, but one her mother had been adamant about. She understood it now, and her mother had been right all those years ago. She couldn't fix him. Lucius had his flaws just like anyone else, but they were his responsibility to fix, if he even wanted to, not hers.

There came a light tapping at the bathroom door, and Hermione's eyes flicked over to it. His voice on the other side was muffled through the thick wood. “Hermione?”

“Go away,” but her reply lacked conviction.

“I wanted to speak with you.”

“Well I want to finish my bath in peace, so you can wait.” She listened for a moment, but when she heard nothing more, leaned her head back again to relax.

It wasn't that she was still mad at him, not really anyway. He was acting in accordance with his nature, just as she did. They would certainly have a talk about decency, but Lucius wasn't going to change. The things that irritated her now, were still going to irritate her after their talk. It would only be her response that changed. What she needed to figure out was whether the admittedly amazing sex was worth dealing with the quirks of Lucius’ personality.
Her heart said yes. Her body practically screamed it. There was no denying that she was addicted to his touch. Her brain was the lone holdout, and that particular organ had always held more sway over her than any other.

Hermione didn't know how much longer she spent in the bath, but by her estimation, she should have probably got out at least fifteen minutes earlier. She dried herself off completely, and slipped into her fluffy robe, fighting to tame down her riot of curls. Running her fingers through her hair one last time, Hermione belted her robe tightly, flung open the door to her room, and promptly found herself sprawled onto the floor in a dazed heap of tangled limbs.

“Ow, what the…,” she groaned in pain, and a matching groan answered from beneath her.

“Lucius?” The lump she had tripped over in the doorway was indeed. “What are you doing?”

He grimaced, rubbing his side, and looked at her, still a bit dazed.

Hermione pushed herself up off him. His gaze flicked downward, and she hastily pulled her robe back into place, glaring at him. “Well?”

“I was waiting. I said I wanted to speak with you,” he replied almost defensively.

She didn't point out, given the mulish tilt of his head, that he could have waited in any of the chairs in the room or even on the bed if he had wanted. He hadn't needed to wait on the floor in front of the bathroom door where she could trip over him. It was a gesture nearly endearing enough to keep her temper at bay. She doubted, after all, that Lucius Malfoy waited for many people, and he certainly didn't sit on the floor to do so. Her shins smarted enough from her unexpected collision that she had to take a calming breath before speaking.

“Fine, but if we're going to talk, then you're going to sit there and listen. Agreed?” She gave him a hard look until he finally nodded in grudging acceptance, and then she settled across from him, taking a moment to gather her thoughts.

“Okay, first, you're not going to yell at me again like you did earlier.”

“I did apologize-”

“We'll get to that in a minute. Don't interrupt.” He fell silent once again. “We're both frustrated. I didn't think it would be easy, but I never imagined it would be this hard. As much as I would hate to, if you treat me like that again, we'll just take duelling off the table. I won't have it.”

When he didn't say anything, she plowed on.

“As far as your apology goes, it wasn't sincere and you know it wasn't. If you don't actually mean it, I'd rather you not say anything at all.” Lucius frowned, his brow creased deeply in his confusion. “What?”

“But, how… If I don't apologize, then how will you forgive me?” he asked haltingly.

She gave him a small smile, a wave of sadness washing through her. “I don't know exactly what you learned, Lucius, but it doesn't actually work like that.”

The skeptical look on his face remained in place. It's presence made her glad that she had not been raised in the same manner Lucius had been. She could admit to a touch of envy, particularly regarding his library, in the not too distant past, but if the tradeoff was viewing the entire world and everyone in it like pieces on a chessboard, then it was a trade she wasn't willing to make. Was
it any wonder that he reacted the way he did?

Hermione stood abruptly, a sudden thought coming to mind, and crossed the room to her trunk.

“What are you doing?” he asked as she began to pull things out of it.

“Getting dressed.”

She glanced back to see that he hadn't moved from his spot, but his eyes were practically glued to her every move. Without a hint of shame or embarrassment, Hermione whipped off her robe, and began to throw on her chosen outfit.

“I want you to spar with me,” she said insistently as she tugged her t-shirt down into place.

Lucius did climb to his feet then, shaking his head emphatically. “It's too soon.”

“No, see I don't think it is.” She crossed to him, taking his hand in hers. “I think it would actually help to know just how outmatched I am.”

“Please,” she added when he refused to answer. “What we’re doing now isn’t working. It can’t hurt to try.”

She couldn't say what it was exactly, but it wasn't anything different in his posture or his body language, and he wouldn't meet her eyes, so it wasn't as if she saw a change in them either. Somehow she just knew that his silence this time was tacit agreement, and she led him from the room without another word.

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Hermione hadn’t expected Lucius to show her what he was truly capable of yet, not with how opposed to the idea he evidently was, and he quite clearly and obviously held back. She was still woefully outmatched just as he had insisted she would be, but being a Gryffindor, she found herself reveling in the action, and it seemed to her that Lucius reveled in it too. Maybe they were more alike than she had originally thought.

He cared about duelling, a lot, saw it as the first step in defending against the dark arts, which was probably why he rode her so hard, and he was good at it. When it came to duelling, Lucius was poetry in motion. He was an opponent to be feared, and an instructor to be admired. His running commentary regarding what she did wrong and how she could improve during their duel was relentless, but welcome. Hermione would wager that he was a better instructor than Professor Lupin had been, possibly even Professor Snape, though he would always have the edge in potions.

Lucius’ arm draped heavily across her stomach later that night, his leg thrown over both of her own, and he nosed against the back of her neck with a small half moan of contentment. He had done the same thing the previous two nights, tightening his hold on her even in sleep. She assumed it was all because she had left him to sleep alone that first night. Hermione just hoped she didn’t dream about being dragged down to the bottom of the Black Lake by the giant squid again.

He breathed deeply, heart thudding against her back, it’s rhythm steady and soothing. “I never intended to be cruel. I just… I'm afraid. Of him. Of what he'll do if…”

Hermione could feel his fear in the thudding that came faster against her back. She laid her hand over his, threading their fingers together.

“I know. You care about your family. I don't envy your position.”
She stroked his arm lightly for a few minutes, up over the back of his hand, and felt the tiny shivers in his skin as her caress tickled the hairs on his arm. He settled behind her, and she murmured, “See, that was a good apology.”

Lucius stiffened slightly. She felt the exhale of his breath against her shoulder.

“I didn't apologize.”

Hermione turned slightly in his arms to look at him out of the corner of her eye. “No you technically didn’t. But it was real and you meant what you said.”

She could tell, even in the low light from the fireplace, that he was thinking about her words, but she really didn’t expect him to say anything more, and turned back around to settle in his embrace once again.

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It had taken another two lessons for her to finally earn an “Excellent form,” and he lowered his wand with an obvious smile of relief as he walked toward her. Lucius wasn't the only one so relieved.

“Now we're going to work on your speed. It doesn't matter how impeccable your form is if you don't have the reflexes to match.”

He moved to stand next to her so he could observe.

“I want you to practice on the dummy again. Give me a spell. Any spell. It doesn't matter.”

Hermione gave Lucius a sidelong glance, but took up her stance without protest. She cast a *Stupefy*, watching in satisfaction as her spell hit dead center, just as he had claimed she would eventually.

“Now, I want you to cast it again, only this time, I want you to focus on trying to shorten your range of motion.”

He came up behind her, placing a hand on her shoulder as the other took hold of her wand hand at the wrist. She tried to ignore the tingle down her spine as he lifted her hand, his body pressed up against her in a lovely and familiar way.

“They teach you to use these large gestures when you're learning so that you can get the wand movements down correctly, but that isn’t strictly necessary. You should be beyond that crutch now. Relax your wrist. Keep your grip light. You'll be able to change positions more quickly if needed in a fight.”

He grasped the shaft of her wand, covering her hand with his own, and demonstrated the motion with her, then he let go and placed both hands on top of her shoulders. “Go ahead.”

She concentrated on the target dummy at the other end of the Malfoy Manor dueling room. She flicked her wand, attempting to control the motion as Lucius suggested.

“*Stupefy!*” Her spell hit the target far left of center, but much quicker than she had expected.

“Again,” he whispered in her ear.

When he called a halt to her lesson for the day, Hermione was certain her knickers had been soaked clear through just from his close proximity, and the husky whisper in her ear alone.
Lucius ran his forefinger absently over the line he had been stuck on for the last several minutes as he waited for Hermione to finish her preparations. He glanced at the closed door of his study, before returning his gaze to the notebook beneath his hand.

Much of what she had written was disjointed. Her journal was full of half formed thoughts, questions for which she had no answers, and though he knew he couldn't help her with all of them, there were a surprising number he was more than willing to lend assistance on.

Lucius swore he could feel the raised ink on the parchment as the pad of his finger glided over the neatly written words again.

*Shock and lust warred in the depths of his gaze, his eyes fluttering closed on a quiet moan. He was never more beautiful than in that moment, and the throbbing of him between my legs echoed my own.*

He smiled at the obvious, though likely unintended poetry of her words. It was a vivid description, one that he could easily see, one that he could almost feel.

His finger circled a singular word. That nameless ‘he’...

Most of her musings were incredibly vague, occasionally nothing more than a single word followed by a question mark, and the ‘he’ could have been anyone, but on a fair few… Well, she clearly had him in mind. And then there was that one fantasy, most assuredly about him, sprawled out in small, neatly ordered script over seven pages, entire sections crossed out with new ones added, and more detail than he had ever anticipated when she had first mentioned it to him. It provided more insight than all the rest of her musings put together.

He couldn't deny the answering throb of desire that shot through him as he read the entry over again. It was a theme he had noticed she returned to time and again in her writings: the moment between one reaction and another.

Lucius could readily admit, to himself, of being a little apprehensive regarding Hermione’s rather candid confessions. Despite his assurances, a small part of him had still worried that she was asking too much given his past. She didn’t know his past, of course, but that didn’t make it less of an issue. Quite the opposite. She didn't know where it was best not to tread. He knew that he should tell her, but doing so would bring up other questions he dared not answer. No, it was best to simply avoid it. There was no way they could get through all of it anyway.

Her journal *did* put him more at ease, because even though there were clearly elements that he found himself uncomfortable with, her writings made it clear that it wasn't his pain that she was after. He didn't even think it was her own pain she was after.

She was exploring, looking for new experiences, and it was her insatiable curiosity that drove her. And what could be more enticing than the moment between action and reaction for such a clearly curious individual, when the coin was still up in the air and there was no telling where it would fall?

Roughness and sensuality.

Pain and pleasure.

For as long as he lived Lucius would never forget the way she responded so viscerally when his darkness was close to the surface. But when he pushed it down and locked it away, and worshiped
her as she deserved, well the way she responded then, mewling in wanton need, was something he
would never forget either. It all made perfect sense now.

It was the dichotomy of the extremes that interested her, and the moment between, the anticipation
of when one was chosen over the other. It was the moving back and forth between the two.

The door creaked open slowly, and Lucius looked up as she poked her head round the door.

He had held off for almost a week, and she had never brought it up again in that time. She had been thinking about it though. He knew that for a fact. Whenever he dipped into her mind, it was a coin toss what he would find: either the scrap of parchment she had hidden in one of his library books for their lesson, or some bit of filth that had him willing away a sudden erection.

Ever since her first taste of the flogger, he had encountered more filth than anything else. And yet, as much as she clearly wanted it, she wasn't pushing him for it, which was why, despite his nerves, Lucius actually felt ready to give it to her.

He wanted to.

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Her Occlumency skills were slowly, rather too slowly for her liking, improving as well. There hadn't been any improvement at all until she had suggested a different approach, one that allowed her to focus on a specific piece of unimportant information to protect, rather than risk Lucius finding something in her mind that might prove truly dangerous. What was good for duelling, going hard right out the gate, apparently wasn't good for occluding. It made sense in a way. Sensitive information, the kind that truly mattered, probably wasn't the best kind to use for learning. The stakes were simply too high, and they were running out of time; factors that were not conducive to learning such an important skill.

Clearly.

Had they the time, it might not have been such a problem.

Lucius withdrew from her mind quickly with a start, shaking his head as if to clear it.

“Your thoughts are wandering again. I need you to focus,” he said wearily, his voice a bit tight.

Her thoughts had been wandering all day, ever since their duelling lesson. She feared, given the direction of her thoughts for most of the day, that she might be turning into a sex addict. Well, days actually. They often seemed to wander when he was around.

“We've been at it for hours, Lucius. I could use a break.”

“It’s only been two,” he countered dismissively.

“That's... hours. Plural.”

He quirked an eyebrow at her, and then rolled his eyes in apparent mock exasperation. “Well, then. Were I inclined to grant such a reprieve, what would you wish to do with it?”

Hermione worried at her lower lip as she gave the question some thought. There were so many possibilities, things she had yet to do. He had been driving her to distraction all day. Well, she desperately wanted him inside her. That was a given. The rest though...
Lucius stood up from his chair, and walked slowly towards her. He looked a little uncertain, but when he reached her, he pulled her into the circle of his arms, grinning down at her with an obvious leer. Lucius bent his head, kissing her tenderly, and Hermione sighed, smiling against his lips as he ground his half formed erection against her abdomen.

Oh, yes. This was a good start to her reprieve.

He drew back, and looked at her, a serious expression on his face.

She smiled hesitantly in confusion. “What is it?”

Lucius took a breath and let it out slowly. He was acting so strange. It was beginning to worry her.

“What?”

He cleared his throat, and then he asked haltingly. “Are you… still interested in- in flogging me?”

Her jaw dropped open in surprise. It was the last thing she had been expecting to hear him say.

“Because I thought if you were, you- we might do that,” he continued in a rush, tripping slightly over his words.

“Are you sure?” He hadn't mentioned it all week. Hermione had been sure that he wasn't going to, and she would have let it slide if that had been the case. “I don't want you to do something you're not okay with.”

Lucius took another deep breath, seeming to regain control of his nerves suddenly. He nodded decisively. “Yes. Yes, I'm sure.”

Hermione smoothed her hand over his chest. As calm as he looked, his heart was still thudding rapidly. “If you change your mind…”

Lucius couldn't completely hide the look of relief in his eyes, though he tried valiantly, nor could he hide the way his thumping heartbeat slowed dramatically beneath her palm, so when he kissed her again, passionately, it wasn't completely unexpected.

Hermione let him pull away first, and when he finally did, it was only far enough away to murmur quietly against her lips.

“Bedroom?” he asked.

She nodded. He always seemed more comfortable in there than he did in the playroom. It wasn't that he hated the playroom, he just wasn't as relaxed, and she figured he would need all the help he could get if he actually followed through.

“I'll get what I need.”

Lucius had paced the floor in front of his bed for several minutes, tugging at the collar of his shirt or rubbing at the back of his neck as he fought down his resurfaced nerves. He had finally settled for sitting at the foot of his bed, breathing deeply to calm himself, his elbows on his knees.

Lucius knew he was worrying unnecessarily, that Hermione wouldn’t actually set out to hurt him, but he couldn’t help it. He had wielded the instrument countless times, he had struck himself so he knew what kind of damage he was inflicting with it, but he had never let anyone, witch or wizard,
flog him. And now he wasn’t just contemplating it, it was imminent, if he didn’t back out first.

He looked up, but didn’t move as the door opened slowly, and Hermione entered carrying a small trunk that she set down on the table near the windows before making her way over to him.

When Hermione pushed open the door to Lucius’ bedroom, she swore he looked like a man about to face an inquisition. She left her equipment and sat down next to him and took his hand in hers, tracing her fingertips lightly across his palm.

“Do you actually want to do this?”

“Yes.”

“Why? Because you don’t act like you want to.”

Lucius gently brushed her hair away from her face. He had a faraway look in his eyes, staring at a spot just past her shoulder. When he answered, his voice was certain, his eyes sincere as they gazed into hers. “I want to do it for you.”

“You don’t have to…”

“I know. And that’s why I want to.” He exhaled slowly. “I know what it feels like. It’s just nerves, I suppose. I’ve never…”

He trailed off, but he didn't have to finish. Hermione slid onto Lucius’ lap, and put her arms around his neck. She felt his hands land lightly on her waist, and she smiled teasingly at him.

“Why Lucius…,” she paused for a second in thought, and he frowned in confusion at her, “whatever-your-middle-name-is Malfoy…”

He chuckled lightly, relaxing for the first time since she had entered the room. “You'll never guess it.”

Her fingernails scratched lightly at his scalp, and she heard him release a small sigh. “But I could always cheat and look it up,” she grinned cheekily.

“And destroy that squeaky clean reputation?” Lucius paused. “It's Tiberius.”

“Tiberius,” she repeated, testing the sound of it on her tongue. “I like it.”

Hermione ducked her head forward, and planted a tender kiss on his lips.

“You can change your mind at any time. You know that?”

“Yes.”

“So, Lucius Tiberius Malfoy,” she whispered, looking at him through lowered lashes, “would you do me the honor of allowing me to be your first? I promise I'll be gentle.”

He actually did a double take when her words finally registered. Hermione’s cheeky little grin couldn’t be contained, and she burst out laughing when he exclaimed, “Oh, Merlin's balls!” and glared at her incredulously as he attempted to suppress his own smirk.

“Well, I certainly wasn't expecting that.”
“Why not?” Hermione stroked her hand over his cheek, unable to resist teasing him just a little bit more. “You make an adorable blushing virgin.”

“I’m far from adorable and I don’t blush,” he groused, “and I am half tempted to change my mind for that remark alone.”

She could tell there was no true anger in his announcement no matter how put out he was, or more likely pretended to be. The more she got to know him, the more Hermione liked teasing Lucius. He responded surprisingly well to it. He had a wicked sense of humor, but could also handle a bit of good natured ribbing, which she was becoming more comfortable doing. Even though there were aspects of his personality that irritated her, it wasn't all bad, and she figured that she couldn't expect him to be the only one to make concessions.

“So, what did you have in mind then?”

“Hmm? Oh!”

His voice was serious again, and the question made Hermione realize suddenly that she had been staring at him, probably with a dopey grin plastered on her face.

“Well, I brought a few things, and we really don't have to use all of them.”

Lucius gave her a stern look. Point taken. She would stop bringing it up.

“I thought here would be a good spot. You standing. Facing the bed. Restrained. An arm to each post.”

She paused, letting him digest the information.

“Go on.”

No obvious issues yet. Hermione silently congratulated herself.

“I didn't want it to be all flogging, ’cause I think my arm would probably fall off, so that trick you do when you stop yourself…”

“Edging,” he supplied.

“Yeah… I wanted to try edging you, because I didn't get to before.”

And she thought it might help relax him, but didn't mention that part. He would probably accuse her of trying to coddle him.

“But I might need your help with that, telling me when, and whatnot, because I'd like for you not to come until... you're fucking me.”

Lucius released a breath Hermione didn't think he realized he'd been holding. “That's- that's a tall order. If that's what you want, I'll probably only be able to help you early on, before I lose the ability to form a coherent sentence.”

“That's kind of what I figured.” Hopefully she was a quick enough study.

“Anything else?”

“Just one.” Hermione pulled her lower lip between her teeth. “Do you think you can handle being blindfolded?”
Lucius’ stomach dropped, his mouth suddenly going dry. It didn't make sense, because she would be behind him anyway, and he wouldn't be able to see what she was doing. Really, it shouldn't have mattered.

He must have been silent far longer than he had realized, because Hermione murmured softly, “We'll hold off on it then.”

Lucius nodded slowly, and Hermione slid off his lap. She made her way back over to the table and lifted the lid off the trunk. From inside she pulled out several lengths of soft silk rope.

From where he stood, Lucius couldn't see inside the trunk, so whichever flogger, or possibly floggers he reminded himself, she had chosen was hidden from him. Hermione placed the ropes on the bed behind him, and then ran her hands up and over his chest, and then back down again. Her touch had a calming effect on him, and Lucius found himself relaxing despite his nerves. When she reached his waist, she gently began to tug his shirt tails free.

Lucius watched her nimble fingers working backwards, starting on the buttons at the bottom, and with each one she worked free, she paused to caress his skin in some way; a kiss, a lick, even the occasional nip with her sharp little teeth. He was panting by the time his shirt was fully undone and she was sliding it free of his shoulders.

Hermione dropped her hands to the placket of his trousers, but then seemed to think better of it, and picked up one of the ropes instead. Lucius held out his hand so that she could start to wind the silk around his wrist. He watched silently as she wound the cord around his wrist several times until she halted, seeming to be trying to make a decision.

“Under and then over,” he whispered helpfully.

She glanced up at him, offering a grateful smile before finishing the knot without further issue. The second rope was quickly knotted around his other wrist, and then Hermione had him turn around before she affixed the ends to each post at the foot of his bed with a sticking charm, though she had to hop up onto the mattress to do it. As short as she was, Hermione wasn't that much taller than himself even with the added height.

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Lucius could tell that Hermione was a bit nervous as her hand landed lightly on the top of his shoulder, and when she leaned forward to press her lips against his, he could feel the thrum of eager anticipation in her touch. He swallowed her throaty, little moan as she rubbed herself up against him. It seemed whatever nerves she had were quickly vanishing in favor of her arousal. It seemed that his were too, because he found himself straining forward against his restraints, and his cock straining against the front of his trousers.

Hermione broke the kiss with a needy gasp, suckling at the pulse point of his throat, before she ducked her head to draw one peaked nipple into her mouth and lave it with her tongue. Lucius groaned half in pain as she grasped a fistful of his pec, digging in. His head was thrown back, his eyes blindly staring up at the ceiling, and he pressed forward as if offering himself to her.

Lucius’ eyelids fluttered closed as he enjoyed her attentions. It took a concerted effort to open them again.

“I want the blindfold,” he whispered, meeting her gaze with his heavily lidded eyes.

She looked at him curiously, and he added, “Maybe not the whole time, but…”
He was glad when she didn't ask him if he was certain.

"Accio blindfold," and then it was flying across the room into her open hand.

Hermione tossed her wand onto the bed behind her, and whipped her shirt off over her head, giving him a tantalizing glimpse of her blush-pink bra dotted with tiny hearts. Then darkness descended as she covered his eyes completely.

Lucius waited, wanting her desperately, and as he waited his wanting only grew. He could hear her, or he imagined he could. As the silence stretched on he found himself straining forward to where she had last been. He encountered only thin air.

What was she doing now?

Was she watching him?

Was she touching herself as she did?

Lucius moaned aloud at that last thought and at long last felt a single finger graze across his lips. He opened his mouth to draw it in and maintain the connection.

Oh, not a finger. A thumb then.

It pushed in deep and then was gone just as quickly and Lucius had to force himself not to whimper at the loss.

She didn’t make him wait long. Her hands began to ghost over his skin, sending delicious sparks flying through his nerve endings. He did hear her get off the bed, felt the change in position as she dragged her fingertips over his ribs, ducking beneath his arm to move around behind. Both her arms wrapped around him, a trail of fire left in their wake as she lowered her hands to the placket of his trousers and started working the buttons free.

Lucius groaned as he was finally freed from the constricting fabric. Her fingers closed around him. A couple of quick strokes and then she was skimming his trousers over his hips, and he was naked on display for her perusal at last. He willed her to touch him again, and as if she heard his silent plea, Lucius felt the brush of her hand down his back.

He jerked when she smacked his arse, turning his head sharply despite his lack of vision. Moments later he hissed out, “Oh fuck...,” as the wet heat of her mouth enclosed the head of his cock.

Hermione glanced up to watch the twisted pleasure at play on Lucius’ face as she sucked and stroked him. His mouth hung open slightly, one corner twitching up into a smile. So far, so good, but then this was the easy, familiar part. He pulled at his restraints as she pumped him in her hand, seeking deeper entry, but Hermione didn’t allow it, and pulled off of him completely instead, dropping her hands as well. Lucius wasn’t in control this time. He didn’t get to set the pace. She did. He stopped straining forward to meet her, and stood waiting for her again. Clearly he understood that without needing to be told.

The rise and fall of his chest was steady as he calmed again. Hermione sat on the end of the bed admiring the view as she shucked her jeans leaving her only in her bra and knickers. Lucius was a truly beautiful man, damaged, scarred, but none of that detracted from his beauty. Without his obvious flaws, he would have been something ethereal and untouchable. His flaws made him human. They made her less timid with her touches.
He tensed but didn’t move this time as she reached up and pinched his nipple, and then slid her hand down his stomach to close around his cock. Hermione leaned forward to lick at the jut of his hip bone as she began to stroke him. She kissed and sucked at the crease where hip met thigh, pleased when his breathing increased and he twitched in her hand but remained still. He was completely at her mercy now, for the first time really, and she wanted to explore him.

Explore she did, kissing him, licking him, suckling him, and touching him in all the ways she had come to discover he liked, and finding new ones that drove him wild, like the spot just behind his testicles that had him drawing up and murmuring rapidly, “I'm close. Fuck I’m close!”

She almost didn’t stop him in time.

The second time he drew near to his climax, she was clamping down on him at nearly the same time he was murmuring the words. The third time she successfully anticipated it, which was good, because Lucius was beginning to lose the ability to form a coherent thought. She took her hands off him, and he didn’t even seem to notice the absence of her touch.

He was clearly flying high on endorphins now. It was time. She wanted him relaxed, not completely out of it after all. Careful not to touch him, she eased away, and moved over to the little trunk on the table, hesitating for only a moment as she picked up the last item she had brought with her.

Hermione made her way back to him slowly. He hadn’t moved a muscle though he was swaying slightly in his bonds, head lowered as though he were still looking down at where she had been. She laid the end of the handle against the side of his neck, but it wasn’t until she began to tenderly brush his hair off his back that he realized what was happening through the haze of his arousal.

Lucius gradually became aware of the braided leather handle crossing over the back of his neck to drape his long hair over one shoulder. His breath caught in his throat. He listened to the quiet tread of Hermione's footsteps and her soft voice came from in front of him.

“How do you want to take it off now?” Her fingers caressed his cheek, brushing the bottom edge of the silk blocking out his vision.

Lucius swallowed the knot in his throat. All his senses were heightened, and he felt every touch more acutely, but he didn't feel like he was pushing his limits. Maybe he was simply aroused enough that he didn't feel anxious about not being able to see what she was doing.

He shook his head. She kissed him deeply, thrusting her tongue into his mouth, and Lucius shivered as the head of his cock brushed lightly against her skin. Hermione stepped around behind him again, and Lucius breathed deeply to keep himself relaxed.

He flinched only slightly as the handle came to rest against his shoulder. She drew a sensual line down the length of his back, stopping at the fleshy swell of his buttocks, and paused with the end resting against the fullest part of his right cheek.

The handle was removed. He knew where the blow would land. Lucius licked his dry lips.

“Are you ready?” she asked.

He nodded. “Yes.”

Lucius braced himself, and she struck. He jerked involuntarily when she made contact, his brow
furrowing in confusion behind his blindfold.

“What!?” he breathed, and then he moaned when her arm wrapped around him, the flogger tails draper over his straining erection.

Hermione whispered against his back, “I told you I'd be gentle.”

She trailed the ends, silky soft, back and forth over the length of him, and he couldn't stop himself from thrusting through the soft fur-lined tails surrounding his cock.

“Oh,” he moaned brokenly.

Mind fucking.

Clearly he needed to add mind fucking to her list of interests.

“Are you ready?”

Lucius nodded enthusiastically, and then whined at the loss of the soft fur as she withdrew the flogger and stepped away.

Hermione whipped him: back, front, and sides.

She dragged the silky tails down his cheek, brushed them over his sensitive nipples, and tickled his stomach with them.

She was also rather fond of flicking his cock and balls, but it didn't actually hurt. It did surprise him though, because with the blindfold on, he never knew when she would do it or where the blow would land. He had squirmed away from her attentions valiantly until she had stuck his feet to the floor, given his arse another smack, and started again, unimpeded this time. He didn't know how long it went on.

Lucius shuddered, his head lolling forward as Hermione brought him back from the brink. She was far too quick a study for his liking, and had tossed the flogger aside at some point in favor of using her hand again. His breathing was labored, a bead of sweat winding its way down his back.

Through his euphoric haze, Lucius heard Hermione say something to him, something about letting him have a gown, but that didn't sound quite right. And then he distinctly heard the words ‘Finite Incantatem’, his arms dropped to his sides, and he collapsed forward onto the bed without any effort on his part as Hermione attempted to slow his descent. The effort came in trying to drag his lower half up onto the mattress. His arms were heavy, and they didn't want to cooperate. He was exhausted by the time he finally managed to roll over onto his back with her help.

Hermione straddled his waist and guided him into her with preamble or warning, and Lucius feared he wouldn't last long as her muscles gripped him mercilessly and she rode him hard. He tried to lift his arms, but they flopped weakly to the bed, so he just lay beneath her, her small hand pressed against his chest for balance, and let her take her pleasure from him.

He didn't feel up to doing much else.

Hermione braced herself against Lucius, and reached down between her legs to rub at her clit. She wished that she had removed her knickers rather than just pull them aside before she had impaled herself on Lucius’ weeping cock, but she had been too impatient. Something to remember for next
time.

She had been so wet, Lucius had slid home easily. He tried to lift his arms, but with the ropes twisted beneath him, he couldn't manage, and he didn't seem to realize what was wrong, only lay there unmoving and moaning brokenly each time she hilted him deep.

She tore at the knots binding his wrists, and then the blindfold, askew but still covering his eyes. His eyes slit open slowly, as if he were still coming out of his euphoric stupor. They remained open, locked on her for only the briefest moment, and then they rolled back as he pushed up slightly against her, clearly lost in the sensations.

His hands were limp when she picked them up, but when she placed them on her waist, his fingers curled against her skin, and his eyes opened again fixating on the sway of her breasts as she rode him. He began to move, nothing more than a gentle roll of his hips, but it told her that he was getting close. She pressed harder against her clit, rushing towards her own climax and milking his from him.

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He hadn’t passed out, but Lucius had been so utterly boneless that she had needed to resort to magic to finally get him situated under the covers. His arm curled around her waist, fingers drawing lazy patterns on the skin of her lower back, and he spoke softly, his voice heavy with exhaustion. It wouldn’t take him long to fall asleep.

“You bought that one? It wasn’t one of mine.”

Hermione smiled, stroking her hand over his chest. “Impulse purchase. It was beautiful, and I liked the way it felt. Never expected to use it.”

She raised her head to look at him, meeting his eyes before continuing. “But then you told me what you liked: blindfolds, silk rope, soft things… It turned out to be perfect. I didn’t actually want to hurt you. I just…”

“You’re still finding yourself. You wanted to explore.” She nodded. That was a good way of stating it.

Hermione put her head back down on his chest, closed her eyes, and sighed deeply, happy with the way things had gone. She opened her mouth to ask him a question, and heard him snoring faintly. Well, it wasn’t anything that couldn’t wait until morning.

Chapter End Notes

So, what did you guys think?!? They both ended up getting what they wanted! The flogger Hermione bought by the way is a rabbit flogger. They are gorgeous and I thought it would be perfect for a Lucius who doesn't like pain, Because kink doesn't always have to be painful. Sometimes it can just be all about pleasure. I'd love to hear your thoughts on this scene. Like I said, it's my first time writing something like it.
Hermione snuggled closer into Lucius’ side, blinking the sleep from her eyes slowly. He sighed in his sleep, tightening his arm around her, but didn’t wake. Hermione splayed her fingers over his chest, playing with the smattering of hair she found there. He stirred slightly as she brushed her fingertips over the upper edge of his massive scar, before sliding her hand down over his stomach. When that hand dipped beneath the sheet, he grasped her wrist tightly, halting her progress.

“Oh, don’t do that. I won’t want to leave this bed if you do that,” he groaned sleepily, blinking slowly at her.

He had stopped her just shy of her goal. She glanced down. He was half interested already. It wouldn’t take much. Hermione nipped playfully at his shoulder, and curled her fingers beneath the sheet, scraping her nails through the neatly trimmed hair at his groin. “I fail to see the downside.”

He sucked in a breath between his teeth. When she glanced down again, the sheet was tenting with his burgeoning interest.

“Mmm, I think, maybe, I’ve corrupted you,” he chuckled, guiding her on top of him.

“I’m not complaining,” she replied with a smile as she leant forward to kiss him. “Did you have a good time last night? It seemed like you did.”

“Unexpectedly good,” and he grinned in fond remembrance. “Now I wonder what other surprises you have in store for me.”

She smiled slyly. “I guess we’ll see.”

Lucius ran a hand through her hair, sweeping back the wild curls where they fell around them as he gazed up at her, and drew her down for a languid kiss. As their mouths moved lazily together, Lucius’ large hands wandered down her back, his nimble fingers unclasping her bra, and he tossed it aside before moving lower, slipping his hands beneath the thin fabric of her knickers to squeeze her bum.

And yet despite his obvious interest…

“You should take another potion—”

She nipped his bottom lip sharply to silence him. “You know I’m still covered. Now, quit stalling and fuck me already.”

She knew what he was doing; trying to distract her long enough to get her out of bed. That wasn't happening.
“Mmm, no I’ve definitely corrupted you…,” he murmured.

With no further protesting, Lucius pulled her knickers aside, and entered her with a needy little growl. Hermione captured his mouth again as she ground herself against him, his fingers fumbling between them, pushing aside the taut fabric to find her clit and stroke it. She reminded herself, again, to take her knickers off first...

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It took nearly an hour for them to finally make their way downstairs for breakfast. Lucius was clearly a little irritated by the delay but not overly so, and he certainly was not irritated regarding the reason for it. He wouldn't have taken the time to go down on her otherwise.

He did hurry her around at breakfast though, and Hermione couldn't help but cheekily drag her feet a little, just to try and get a rise out of him. She managed to get a clenched jaw, and an irritated little growl, but for the most part he appeared unaffected. It finally took a pointed comment about how much work actually lay ahead of them for her to give up her game.

They established an easy routine moving forward. She couldn't really put her finger on it, but following her first foray into taking charge in the bedroom, Lucius just seemed noticeably relaxed in a way he hadn't been before. He was almost playful during their duel. He smiled more, and she couldn't chalk it all up to her improved technique. She also enjoyed it much more than she had those first few days; Lucius’ good mood an infectious balm.

Occlumency... that was a different story; one that was not going as well as she had hoped.

“So, how long will it take me this time?” Lucius asked, pushing open the library door.

“But this time you're not going to succeed. You don't know.”

He glanced back at her snarky reply, a smirk gracing his lips. “Well, I haven't failed yet, and considering your record I'm not likely to this time either. But you need to learn to control your thoughts. I'm not really keen on the idea of the Dark Lord knowing exactly what I've been up to with you.”

“Because you don't want anyone to know you've been slumming?”

Lucius caught her arm as she brushed past him, stopping her suddenly and meeting her gaze with unexpected sincerity. “Because a gentleman shouldn't boast like a woman is some kind of conquest.”

She searched his face, but the sincerity in his eyes was reflected in his words. “I wish more of the boys my age thought that way.”

“If that’s your way of calling me old fashioned...,” he replied with a small smile, but that smile faltered, and a frown creased his brow.

“And because if he sees any of that... well, he won't kill you quickly. He won’t kill either of us quickly,” he added quietly.

It was easy for Hermione to forget that they were playing a dangerous game, especially when Lucius did his best to shield her from the subject. Whenever the subject did come up, it was always a sobering reminder.

“I'll get it,” she promised, her words earnest as she gazed up at him.
Lucius lifted his hand to cup her cheek and said, quite simply, “I know you will.”

As poorly as things were going, he could have been lying to her to boost her confidence, but it didn't feel to her like he was lying. She supposed it didn't really matter if he was. It was appreciated regardless.

She was taking longer this time than she really should have, casting about for ideas, for ways to be the one who finally came out on top in their lessons. It wasn't just for her. It was for the both of them. It was for everyone.

Lucius was getting frustrated and she was too. Despite the joking and the jovial demeanor, every time he withdrew from her mind his shoulders would sag just the slightest bit in disappointment. She may have managed to keep her thoughts relatively clean, but she was doing a poor job of safeguarding her information, and it wasn't even the important kind. It might have taken him longer, but Lucius found it anyway.

As the lesson dragged on, he had eventually stopped plucking each book off the shelf with his smug, infuriating smile, stopped thumbing through the pages in search of her little scrap of parchment. Instead he had merely heaved a sigh, given her a weary, encouraging smile, said, “Try again,” and stepped out of the room.

So, here she was, trying again. She had lost count of the exact number of attempts, but whatever it was, it was too damned high. A scant handful of days remained until she was due back; fewer and fewer opportunities to get it right with each passing hour.

She didn't get it right that time either, or any time during the hour after that. It weighed on her heavily, so much that Lucius made her quit for the day. She didn't want to. She fought him on it actually, but he wasn't having it. He picked her up and carried her from the library and she hated it because the gesture only made her want to cry angry tears of disappointment against his shoulder.

She protested as Lucius made his way upstairs, but he merely nodded absently in response to her tirade, making small noises of agreement in the back of his throat in response. When she muttered under her breath that he was simply impossible, he whispered in her ear, agreeing wholeheartedly, “Yes, completely. I’m a Malfoy, remember?”

Lucius deposited her in the middle of her bed, stripping off her clothes with deliberate care, his hands languidly caressing her newly revealed flesh. She went quite willingly when he urged her onto her stomach, settling into the mattress with a sigh when he moved up to straddle her hips and splay his hands across her lower back. As he dug his thumbs into the tensed muscles along her spine, Hermione noted how unusual it was for them to be doing this here. Lucius always took her to his rooms. Granted hers was closer.

She snaked an arm behind, feeling for the evidence of his impatience, and he promptly pushed her hand away with a chuckle. “That's not why we're here.”

Oh, so that was it. He thought it more likely he could control himself here. Well, they would see about that.

Hermione allowed him to continue with a small chuckle of her own. He worked the tension from her muscles, and all too soon she found herself drowsy from his ministrations. Her mind drifted as she simply enjoyed the strong, sure touch of his elegant hands, and she wondered how they had gotten to this point.
“Lucius,” she murmured.

“Hmm?”

She turned over beneath him, gazing up into eyes nearly as hooded as her own. Despite his earlier statement, Lucius didn't fight her when she switched their positions, straddling him, and nibbling tenderly on his throat.

“Did you ever imagine we'd be doing this?” she whispered.

He shook his head slightly, clearly only half attending to her words.

She smiled. “Neither did I. I mean, back in the beginning, I just knew that you would… I was sure of it... but I never imagined this.”

Hermione laughed somewhat nervously. “I've kind of wondered how it would have been different if you hadn't been recruiting me. If I hadn't been in your dungeon because you wanted my help. I mean you never even wore your robes.”

“What?” Lucius asked in confusion, seeming to return to his senses slowly.

“At the world cup, Harry said you all wore dark robes and masks. I just wondered if you might ever-”

A brief look of trepidation stole across his features, before it turned into a fully blown look of panic as he suddenly realized what she was asking, and she abruptly found herself dumped off his lap, practically thrown in fact.

“I can't do that,” he whispered, horror etched in his voice, scrambling backwards as quickly as possible.

His chest rose and fell rapidly as he stood next to the bed.

She reached out for him and he drew back as though her touch would burn. “Lucius, it's okay. I-”

“No. Don’t ask me again,” he hissed, interrupting her, and then he all but fled from the room, the door left standing open in his wake.

“What in Merlin's name?” she muttered to herself, shocked at what had just happened.

Lucius had never behaved in such a way before. This fear he was displaying, and it absolutely was fear, it could be nothing else, was something she had never truly witnessed from him before. Now that she thought about it, she supposed it was a little naïve of her to think he would be okay with it. Of course he would probably have some bad associations with his Death Eater persona. It was something she should have anticipated. She didn't even know what had prompted her to ask in the first place. It was just one of those random thoughts she had touched on in her journal. Clearly it was a thought that she should have kept to herself.

Hermione waited for nearly an hour to give him time to calm down before she sought him out. It had seemed like he needed it, and it was the least she owed him. She knocked on his door hesitantly, but there was no answer. The latch slipped as she knocked a second time, the door opening a fraction. It hadn't been shut completely in Lucius’ earlier haste which did not bode well.

Hermione stood rooted to the floor for a long time, staring at that sliver of darkness beyond the doorway.
Should she really go in?

She didn't know.

Hermione poked her head inside the darkened room. “Lucius?”

“Master is not inside, Miss.” The little elf appeared out of nowhere, startling her. Hermione just did manage to keep from screaming out loud in her sudden fright.

“Oh. Well then, can you tell me where is he, Cresta?” she asked once she had calmed herself. “I wanted to speak with him, to apologize.”

Cresta shook her little head. “Master is resting. Master does not wish to be disturbed, Miss.”

Hermione glanced at the door suspiciously. Lucius was resting, but not in his room? That didn’t make sense. “Cresta, is he okay? The way he left earlier...”

The elf looked at her curiously, hands wrung together in a nervous, self-soothing gesture, and then it asserted in a decisive tone, “Master will be fine, Miss.”

She hesitated for a moment though.

“But best not to bring it up.” Cresta vanished with a tiny pop just as quickly as she had appeared, leaving Hermione alone to wander back down the hall to her own room.

For the first time since she had been let out of his dungeon, Lucius didn't join her for dinner. Hermione picked worriedly at her meal and went to bed alone. At some point during the night, after tossing and turning as sleep eluded her, she padded down the hall and crawled into Lucius’ giant, empty bed. The comforting scent of him on the pillows finally lulled her into a deep, though restless sleep.

-----------------------------------------------

Lucius awoke slowly, his mouth too dry to swallow. He sat up feeling stiff, and looked around at the darkened bedroom he had chosen, tucked away in a closed off wing of the manor. The lingering effects of Severus’ potion dulled his thoughts and muted his senses. As such, he wasn't truly aware of stumbling from the room and making his way through the manor's halls, nor of pushing open the door to his own rooms and sliding beneath the sheets. He was dimly aware of the startled gasp and relieved sigh and the smell of her shampoos wrapping around and embracing him as he pressed his nose against the curve of a warm neck and buried his face in a riot of curls before he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep at last, not brought about by a potion.
Mistress in the Making

Chapter Notes

I'm back with another chapter! This one was so long, that I had to break it up into two. Their little holiday adventure is at last coming to an end, and Hermione is coming into her own sexually. Ninety percent of their scene is pre-negotiated, and despite anything Hermione may say, Lucius has the option of withdrawing consent at any time.

Also, is it just me who thinks Hermione got a little bit of a sexual thrill when she punched Draco? Can't just be me. That girl's always been a little violent...

Hermione could hear the shower running before she opened her eyes. She stretched slowly, yawning, and pulled the sheets up to her chin staring at the closed bathroom door with apprehension. Lucius had slept like the dead once he had rejoined her during the night, and she suspected the effects of a dreamless sleep potion at work for that to have happened. It made her feel terribly guilty for even voicing her request to think that he had needed to resort to such measures just to get to sleep.

When he finally emerged from the bathroom, a towel wrapped around his waist, and met her gaze, his eyes were clear rather than clouded, though he did still look a bit tired; a lingering effect of the potion perhaps. He turned away without saying a word, moving towards his wardrobe, and began getting dressed for the day. Her eyes tracked his every move as she watched him from across the room, her mind whirling with a myriad of suppressed emotions.

“Aren't you going to get ready?”

Hermione cocked her head, a frown creasing her brow. His voice was so calm thrown casually over his shoulder at her as he adjusted the collar of his shirt. How was he so calm when she was a ball of nerves? Her stomach hurt with it.

Lucius finished tucking his shirt into his trousers as he walked towards her. His steps were unhurried as well, though not deliberately slowed with reluctance either. He sat down on the bed next to her, reaching out to gently tuck a lock of hair behind her ear.

And then he smiled at her.

It was almost as if-

“I hope you aren't planning to lounge around in bed all day. There's work to be done.”

-as if he were avoiding the events of the previous night altogether; almost as if they hadn't even happened at all.

“I'll have breakfast started. It should be ready when you come down.” The backs of his knuckles lingered on her cheek before he pushed himself to his feet and headed towards the door.

“Don't be too terribly long though,” he called back to her, turning slightly to meet her eyes before closing the door silently behind him.
Hermione sat up slowly, scooting back against the headboard, staring at the closed door, and hugging her knees to her chest. Cresta had asked her not to bring it up. Lucius clearly wasn't going to. She had thought he might, that he would explain to her what the problem was, but it was evidently part of that painful past he didn't like dwelling on.

Her stomach churned as she considered the possible reasons he refused to even acknowledge their misunderstanding. Either Lucius was protecting himself emotionally, and the vivid memory of his panicked expression made that incredibly likely, or he was protecting her, and if that were so, then the truth he was trying to protect her from was something he didn't think she could accept.

She had never really considered exactly what Lucius or any Death Eater did in Voldemort's service. He had never offered to tell her, but neither had she asked. If his reaction was any indication, she really didn't wish to know. Hermione was sure that Lucius would tell her if she pressed him on it which made her reluctant to press the issue. She wasn't sure that she could continue to work with him if it turned out to be as bad as she thought it might.

Maybe that meant he was right to keep it from her. With a resigned sigh, Hermione flung back the sheets, and swung her legs over the edge of the bed. She didn't know the answer to that one either.

By the time she finished showering and entered the informal dining room where they took most of their meals, Hermione had come to a decision. Lucius sipped at his coffee, his eyes glued to the morning’s *Prophet*, and she couldn’t help but conclude that he was avoiding her. He had probably taken the time to steel himself for a barrage of questions.

“Would you pass the cream?” Hermione asked just as she did every morning and took her seat.

Lucius’ eyebrow lifted slightly, but he did as requested with a quietly murmured, “Of course.”

“Thank you,” she replied, reaching for the pot of delicious-smelling coffee. “Anything new in there?”

“Oh, nothing that would interest you.” Lucius smiled and angled the paper towards her. She glanced over, making a face when she spied the word ‘Sports’ at the top of the page, and with a small chuckle, Lucius peeled off the sports section and passed her the rest of the paper.

As difficult as it was to deny her nature, she had decided she would let the matter rest; for the moment anyway. They were in the middle of a war after all, and she couldn't endanger what they were doing by forcing the issue.

The entire debacle had made one thing glaringly obvious to her. Hermione knew exactly the sorts of lingering touches that made his knees buckle, and she could pinpoint the moment just before he came because his breath always stuttered in a specific way, but she still knew precious little about him as an individual. Most of what she knew was pieced together from conjecture.

And Lucius… Well, there was little doubt he knew her body intimately too, knew that the feel of his teeth, whether he broke skin or not stole her breath, that his nails, too short to do much real damage, still raised red welts on her skin with a satisfying sting. He touched her in all the right ways too often not to know, but he didn't know just how much she had come to enjoy his company because she didn't dare even admit it to herself.

For all that they talked, they didn't really communicate, not when it came to the important stuff anyway. She hadn't realized that truth until now, but now that she did, it was easy to see looking
back.

No, they had never really communicated. Why would they start now? Hermione supposed it was more or less one of those difficult decisions he had told her she would have to come to terms with. She had played at being Slytherin in the beginning, really not all that long ago, and Lucius, being the expert, had beaten her at her game.

The coffee was nearly too hot, and she sipped it slowly, spreading out the newspaper and thinking that maybe it was time to stop playing at being a Slytherin and get serious about it instead. She enjoyed his company. She could continue to enjoy his company. It didn't have to be any more complicated than that.

The first time they were intimate following what Hermione had dubbed ‘the misunderstanding’ was a bit awkward in the beginning.

For her anyway.

Not for Lucius.

Just as Hermione had predicted, there was no noticeable difference in Lucius’ behavior post-misunderstanding with one glaring exception. He actively avoided taking the dominant role whenever possible. It was a subtle shift that she might not have noticed if she weren't hyper aware of his every move and she didn't already know what he was really like in the bedroom.

Falling back into the intimacy they had developed was surprisingly easy, and Hermione didn’t actually mind taking over, but she did wish they shared the position more equally. Perhaps they would have if she had thought first before opening her mouth; a feat she had struggled with for as long as she could remember.

Her hand fluttered along the neckline of her dress, trembling slightly as she looked critically at her reflection.

Despite the shift in their dynamic, Lucius remained an excellent guide on her journey. There was only the one request so far he had been unable to comply with. He had been quite enthusiastic about everything else, though she had also been much more careful when it came to her requests. His easy acceptance relieved her because the day of her departure was now imminent and that meant only one thing that she had grown nervous about since their misunderstanding.

It was time.

Lucius was still willing to let her indulge in her fantasy; the one detailed in the journal he had made her show him. He was insisting on it. She did up the buttons on her modest robes concealing the dress beneath, half elated and half fearful of what was to come.

Lucius’ pulse beat with wild anticipation as he checked Hermione's journal for probably the hundredth time before sliding it back into his desk drawer. He had read it so many times that he had memorized his dialog like the script to a play, but there remained large portions that were significantly less well-defined. It would take a bit of improvisation on his part to fulfill his role in her fantasy, but that wasn't anything new. They had always made it up as they went along to an extent. Their meeting in the vacant classroom was a prime example.
Now that the hour drew near, the outwardly calm demeanor he had maintained all day was crumbling, and maintaining his composure was becoming a feat. It wasn’t fear, however, that made his heart pound. It was excitement.

Lucius had worried initially that her unexpected request only days before would be a problem, but he found that he wasn’t angry at her; himself, yes, but not her. After all, he had seen it in her journal, and he had known she was at least curious. He should have told her it was off limits.

He just hadn’t expected her to be bold enough to ask, but really he should have known better. A rueful smile graced his lips briefly. Hermione Granger had done nothing but surprise him from the start, and he would be lying if he said he didn’t enjoy it, unfortunate incidents aside.

He was dressed exactly as she had dictated, grateful that magic meant that he at least wasn’t required to swelter beneath his heavy robes. All he could do was wait as he sat at his enormous desk, scratching absently with his quill on the parchment before him. He wasn’t really writing anything, the ink having long since dried. Instead, his ears were tuned toward the door as they had been since taking his seat. Where in Merlin’s name was she? She had kept him waiting long enough.

Hermione stood just outside the study door worrying her bottom lip between her teeth. His bedroom suite was ready. She had already placed the necessary items for later. Now all she had to do was walk through the door and begin. She wasn’t afraid that he wouldn’t want it. The memory of him and Professor Snape, his reactions and enthusiasm told her that he wanted it.

It was just nerves really.

They had discussed what would happen that evening in general terms. He had her journal. There was just one detail that they hadn’t discussed, that wasn’t written down: the surprise she had mentioned previously. After his reaction to her last surprise, she had come to the conclusion that it was too much of a risk, but when she had tried to tell him what she had in mind, he hadn’t wanted to know, hadn’t seemed bothered in the slightest.

Apparently, he only took issue when she was asking him to fake-kidnap and have his way with her. She hoped that was all he took issue with anyway. It would have made her feel more at ease if he would have just let her tell him, because what she had in mind, would quite possibly constitute new territory.

She took a deep breath and pushed open the door with a confidence she didn’t quite feel. He stood up at her entrance, the gesture ingrained in him in this more formal setting she had requested, staring at her, not quite able to hide his eagerness, and Hermione struggled to suppress a smile. His reaction only served to bolster her shaky confidence. She walked toward him taking in his appearance: his fur and velvet cloak with its dual serpent clasps, his beautifully tailored jacket with its dozen buttons, and the crisp, high-collared shirt peeking out from beneath it. He’d chosen the white one, and it contrasted nicely with all the rich blacks of the rest of his outfit.

He had dressed impeccably, but she’d expected no less. She had told him that she wanted the arrogant bastard she had met in Flourish and Blotts all those years ago, and it seemed from the rigid set of his shoulders as though he would not disappoint. He indicated the chair across from his desk with a perfunctory wave of his hand, and reclaimed his seat only after she had made herself comfortable.

“Miss... Granger?” he queried with a slight tilt of his head and raised eyebrow as though he didn’t quite remember her name, as though she were not quite important enough for him to do so.
“To what do I owe the pleasure?” he sneered, his demeanor haughty and condescending.

Oh, he was absolutely perfect.

They’d barely begun and already she felt positively alive with anticipation, her body thrumming with arousal.

“Mr. Malfoy,” she greeted politely with a tight smile, trying desperately to calm her racing heart. “Thank you for agreeing to meet with me on such short notice. I’ll cut to the chase. Following the Yule Ball, an interesting rumor reached me pertaining to your behavior that night. I thought it best to clear the air directly with you.”

He smiled disarmingly, a hint of disdain underneath. “My behavior is impeccable, always, though I am curious to know of what I stand accused.”

“I was told that you couldn’t take your eyes off me the entire night, and that you had a few choice things to say about me. Is this true?”

“I admit to a cursory observation or two,” Lucius conceded. “I was curious about the muggle-born witch who had bested so many pure-bloods. I’m still not convinced your high praise has been wholly earned.”

He smirked at the dark look that momentarily clouded her features. “I, however, said nothing disparaging your rather unfortunate blood status.”

“Oh, the rumors weren’t about you disparaging me.” Hermione finally unbuttoned and shrugged out of her robes, laying them across the back of the chair as if settling in for a long debate.

“Quite the opposite, in fact.” She smoothed out a few nonexistent wrinkles in her dress, brushing her hands across her breasts and over her hips in a seemingly innocent gesture and looked at him pointedly. “They were entirely inappropriate remarks for a school governor to make regarding a student.”

The deep blue dress hugged her developing curves in all the right places. She had noticed that he seemed to like blue quite a lot, and judging by his expression, her choice of attire was more than acceptable. The dress had been an impulse purchase, really just a touch too grown-up for her with, in her opinion, its plunging neckline, but when she had tried it on, it had made her feel sexy in a way her dress at the Yule Ball hadn’t. She had felt beautiful at the ball with Viktor. The way Lucius was staring, as if he were thinking of leaping over the desk and simply taking her on the floor, she felt desired.

She wondered just how hard he was underneath his desk. She was growing uncomfortably damp herself.

Remembering suddenly how she had requested he act, Lucius wiped the hungry look off his face with monumental effort and glared at her. “That’s quite the accusation, Miss Granger. Had you done your homework before this meeting, you would have known who you were dealing with, how dangerous I can be when provoked. You would have known better.”

“I always do my homework, Mr. Malfoy,” she replied matter-of-factly, standing and sauntering around the corner of the desk towards him.

He spun slowly in his chair, making sure to keep her in front of him. Hermione suppressed another smirk. She had known she could count on his suspicious Slytherin nature to lead him right where she wanted him.
“I asked around about you and found out many interesting things. I even heard a rumor that you weren’t nearly so proper as you claim to be.”

“You shouldn’t believe everything you hear,” he answered dismissively.

“Oh, I know. I didn’t,” she laughed. “It was completely unbelievable, but then I heard it a second time and I wondered. When I heard it for the third time, I set up this meeting to see if the rumor was true.”

With her hand on the desk for support, she lifted one heeled foot, placed the toe deliberately over the swell of his crotch, and pressed down firmly. His knuckles turned white where they gripped the arms of his chair. He squeezed his eyes shut tightly, head falling back slightly, and bit back a whimper.

“Well that part was true at least. What about the rest of it?”

Hermione removed her foot and moved around to the back of his chair. She leaned down, sliding one hand over his shoulder and down the front of his chest, and whispered close beside his ear, “Is it true, Mr. Malfoy? Do you truly fancy being at the mercy of a mudblood?”

He released the breath he had been holding with a shudder. The satisfaction, as well as the smile, was evident in her voice as she whispered, “If so, follow me.”

Lucius stood in the middle of his bedroom steadying his breathing, reluctant to take his eyes off her. She was exquisite, as he had known she would be. Yes, she had started off a bit hesitant. He had expected such, but she was finding her rhythm quickly enough, especially following his shot at her intelligence. The ire in her eyes had been unmistakable though she had recovered rather quickly. Barring a few exceptions, his past lovers hadn't managed to keep him off balance, but Hermione would excel at the mental game. That much was already obvious.

He found that he was actually enjoying himself immensely, despite Hermione's desire to play games with a word he had always hated. It was crass and vulgar, and Lucius had never actually said it before. He had always shied away from its use, and left it to the likes of Lestrange and Avery, but apparently it was important to her, and he felt certain he would be saying it tonight at her behest. An unexpected thrill had shot down his spine at her utterance, and in light of that knowledge, it didn't seem so terrible a request to indulge.

Lucius had learned her body and her desires well, especially since he had begun teaching her. She was both more and less like him than he had thought, eschewing elaborate instruments in favor of raw physicality, and much like their meeting at Hogwarts, Lucius had quickly learned how much better she responded when he didn't insist on being a stickler for the rules. He had, of course, taught her the basics, but there was something wild and dangerous in her that he found himself unwilling to fully tame.

Oh, he had noticed how much she loved it when he used his hands and what the sound of his voice did to her; how goosebumps rose on her skin in the wake of his touch, and the way she shivered from a bit of well timed filth growled in her ear. And he would be blind if he hadn't noticed that she enjoyed the struggle almost as much as the sex. Yes, he really should have seen her earlier request coming long before she ever voiced it.

Lucius glanced around surreptitiously. There was nothing obviously out of place save for the chair she had placed in the middle of the room and the familiar silver pot that lay casually at the foot of
his bed. He wondered what toys she had purchased. Whatever they were, they were hidden, but surely she had bought something for tonight. It was necessary. Tonight they wouldn't get far if she hadn't. The soft glow from the bathroom caught his eye.

There.

Perhaps there.

She stalked towards him and he stood a little straighter, his gaze refocused on her. Hermione reached out, running her hand down his chest and back up again over the fur of his cloak.

“So soft,” she murmured and unfastened the snake clasps.

“Take it off,” she ordered.

It went against his every instinct, but he stood still and looked at her defiantly. She wasn’t through with her game yet, and he had agreed to remain defiant, as part of their compromise, until his knees touched the floor. Being the one calling the shots had its charms, but there was a freedom in submission that he loved; a freedom he’d been denied for far too long. He just hoped she would be done playing with him soon.

Hermione tsked at him in mock disappointment. “Come now Mr. Malfoy. I’m quite sure you have nothing to be embarrassed about.”

“Malfoys don’t take orders from your kind,” he sneered.

“Don't tell me you're afraid to say it,” she answered back, amusement coloring her voice. “We both know what you mean.”

The next words out of his mouth were hissed with such conviction, he could believe that she almost believed them. “I don’t take orders... from mudbloods.”

She responded without skipping a beat. “That's not what I've heard.”

Hermione smirked at him as she pushed the cloak from his shoulders to pool on the floor at his feet.

“Are you certain you don’t just want to be convinced?” He gasped as she reached down and palmed him through the fabric of his trousers. When she squeezed slightly, he bit the inside of his cheek to stop a moan from escaping. “As much as I enjoy a well-tailored jacket on a man... I’m going to need you to take it off. Now.”

His hands were moving before he realized it, compelled by her seductive voice and insidious hand, and they shook as he complied. She continued to tease him until he faltered.

“Fuck!” he cursed under his breath as he struggled with the seventh button. Why did his jacket have so many fucking buttons? Soon enough though it followed his cloak to the floor.

“It seems you do take orders rather well.”

She pulled his shirt from the waistband of his trousers, and he groaned remembering that it too had far too many buttons for his liking.

“I’ve been wondering what you were hiding under here,” and agonizingly slowly, as though she were carefully unwrapping a present, began to take it off him.
It dropped to the floor as well, and she stroked her hands over his chest and stomach, possessiveness coloring her inspection. “Nothing to be embarrassed about at all.”

His eyes were hooded with arousal as she maneuvered him into the chair and he watched, riveted, as she unzipped her dress, let it pool around her feet, and stepped out of it. Lucius licked his lips, a moth enthralled by her flame. She was stunning, wearing nothing but her lacy bra and knickers, a darker blue even than her dress, almost black, made from the most delicate looking lace. Her breasts were framed perfectly in the cups, her nipples clearly peaked beneath the fabric. And then there were those delicious-looking heels… but he was screaming internally. The chair wasn’t the floor, which meant she still wasn’t done toying with him.

She circled him, hand in his hair, her nails scratching lightly at his scalp, then skimming across his shoulder, and then closing with light pressure around his throat. He relaxed into her touch as her hand caressed down his chest and his eyes drifted closed as she tugged open his trousers, pulling him free. Her touch was light, teasing as she stroked him, and Lucius gripped onto the seat in white-knuckled desperation, resisting the urge to wrap his hand around hers and increase the pace, though he couldn't quite stop himself from pushing up into her hand.

All at once, he let out a strangled cry, and his eyes flew open as something unexpected clamped down around his cock and balls. When he looked down in bewilderment, a smooth silver band with glowing green runes rested snug around him. Lucius was horrified, stunned as he stared at it. Oh Merlin, he’d forgotten that... The glowing band winked up at him innocuously, as though mocking his newfound predicament.

His eyes snapped to her face, glowering at her, but she was indifferent.

Unmoved.

“Do you honestly think I’m incapable of a little self-control, witch?” he snarled.

The sting that bloomed in his cheek took him by surprise and he jolted in his chair. It wasn’t painful per se, just shocking, stealing his breath. He’d known it would happen at some point during the evening. It still took his breath away. His reaction to it was visceral, and there was a feral, dangerous gleam in his eyes through the glare he leveled at her.

The words were on the tip of his tongue, some scathing retort, until the look she gave him halted him in his tracks, and he forgot what he was going to say. The unmistakable gleam of arousal lit up her eyes with a wild sort of beauty that entranced him.

Hermione smiled sweetly, and slapped him harder. His cheek grew hot almost instantly, stinging from the pain of her strike, and he sat there mouth agape and unexpectedly speechless.

There was no way he would ever admit it to her, but when her hand connected with his cheek the second time, he was grateful for the cock-ring. He had never anticipated the situation to be quite so arousing. Spending himself so soon like an over-eager schoolboy would have been far more humiliating than receiving a couple of smacks to the face.

She gripped his balls, squeezing, and he squirmed under her assault with a sharp gasp.

“You agreed to this,” she replied dangerously.

“I gave you an out. You didn’t take it. Do you know what that means?” Hermione asked as she tightened her grip on him, wrenching a sob from his throat.

“It means your body is mine and I’ll decide what to do with it.” Lucius yelped, his hips jerking
involuntarily, as her hand connected resoundingly with the shaft of his cock. His breathing came in short, rapid pants as he struggled to remain still under her touch.

She stroked her hand over him, soothing the sting, and he couldn’t stop the moan that escaped. “It means your orgasm is mine and I’ll decide if I let you have it.”

The metal band strangling him assured that outcome. Where was she getting this? There was no trace of the nervous, inexperienced, young woman who had walked into his study. This was a woman who knew what she wanted, and right now, she demanded his complete surrender to her. Lucius was eager to give up the reins of control to her, but it seemed as though she preferred to take it from him.

She released her death-grip on his scrotum, and placed both hands on either side of his face, forcing his head forward. When she spoke the hard edge in her voice was gone, replaced by a seductive, soothing gentleness. “Isn’t that what you wanted?”

He stared transfixed into her hypnotizing chocolate orbs.

“Yes,” Lucius whispered, his voice on the edge of breaking. Whether or not it had been true before, it certainly was now, and he was only too willing to play any role she wanted him to.

Hermione pressed her lips against his with the gentlest touch. “Then I expect you to start cooperating and call me ‘Mistress’,” and then she pulled him out of the chair roughly to land in a heap on hands and knees at her feet.

Rather than rise from the floor, Lucius bowed low in supplication, his hair falling around him to obscure his face, his brow resting lightly against the patent leather of the heels he had admired from afar.

“Yes, Mistress.” His voice was low and thick, matching perfectly the supplication in his posture.

“Now take off the rest of your clothes,” she ordered.

He scrambled to obey and quickly returned to his position once he had rid himself of his trousers, shoes, and socks.

“Raise your head.” He did so, sitting up in a kneeling position, hands resting on his thighs, but kept his gaze fixed firmly on her feet.

“Now, Lucius- I’m sure you don’t mind if I call you ‘Lucius’, unless…,” he could imagine a playful, thoughtful expression gracing her features from the sound of her voice, “you would prefer something different; something that reflects your need to get on your knees for any mudblood who tells you to.”

Fuck! He couldn’t believe how hot that was coming out of her mouth. His opinion on the word was rapidly changing.

She paused and when she spoke there was only the slightest quaver in her voice to show how uncertain she still was. “Slut perhaps.”

Truly, she needn’t have worried. He drew in a quick breath, cock jumping visibly.

“Oh, I can see you like that.” Lucius held his breath, his entire body rigid with anticipation. He could tell from the sound of her voice that she liked it too, and he wanted desperately to see the look on her face, to see his own arousal reflected in her.
She patted his cheek condescendingly, and then stated emphatically, “‘Lucius’ it is.”

His shoulders dropped in disappointed. “Now Lucius, since we both know the truth about you, there's no need to hide behind the facade. Tell me what it is that you want.”

This part of the game, at least, was familiar, and his answer was immediate. “I wish only to please you, Mistress.”

Hermione appeared to consider his answer for a moment. “Hmm, is that so? You would use your hands then?”

Lucius smiled remembering. It seemed like so long ago, but as the point when things had truly changed between them, it wasn't something he would easily forget. “Yes, Mistress.”

She caressed his cheek, her thumb lingering on his bottom lip. “Would you use your mouth?”

“Absolutely, Mistress,” he answered, nuzzling against her hand.

She walked around him, sliding her hand over his shoulder as she did so. “You would swallow?”

“As though I were dying of thirst, Mistress.”

Hermione dropped down to crouch next to him, sliding her hand down his back sensually as she did so, whispering in his ear, “And if I wanted to fuck you?” She slid her hand over his backside, caressing the firm globe possessively, and gripped him tightly, her fingers dipping into the valley between his cheeks.

Lucius groaned, blinking rapidly. He looked up and stared into her eyes as he said, “I would beg for it, Mistress.”

She struck him again, and he broke eye contact, dropping his gaze to the floor with a whimper. “If I want you to look at me I'll tell you to.”

What had he been thinking? He knew better. Had he truly become so lost in her touch that he would forget?

Lucius didn't move as she soothed his stinging cheek. “I'll keep it in mind though.”

She stood and moved behind him. He heard her sit in the chair at his back. “Please me then. We'll see just how far you're willing to go.”

Lucius turned and took in the sight that greeted him, peeking through lowered lashes. He crawled the short distance to her, placing his palms on both her thighs, just above each knee, but made no further move, keeping his head inclined respectfully. “Would you like to feel my tongue, Mistress?”

“I believe I would,” she replied, inclining her head imperiously. Lucius slid his shaking hands over her thighs, reaching for the scrap of lace covering his goal, and with her assistance, gently tugged her knickers down, removing them entirely. She hooked her legs over his shoulders and drew him forward with her heels pressed into his back. “Hands behind you, and don’t make me come.”

“I won’t, Mistress,” he replied with an emphatic shake of his head as he clasped his hands behind his back, and shifted to a slightly more comfortable position on his knees.

Lucius ducked his head forward and breathed in her unique scent as his tongue slipped within her
wet heat, sliding over her engorged clit. He used all of his considerable skill as he licked and sucked her, devouring her voraciously. When one leg came off his shoulder giving him better access, it was not unexpected, so he thought nothing of it.

Focused on the task at hand, Lucius moaned lowly, but didn't truly notice the first brush of Hermione's foot against the underside of his sac. It wasn't until she tapped her foot against him playfully that his hips jerked forward of their own volition, and he stopped what he was doing, his eyes snapping open, though he resisted the instinct to look at her.

“Mistress?” he questioned, but said no more when she shushed him, and pressed more firmly against his testicles. The toe of her heel nudged just behind the ring, and Lucius found himself acting without thought. His cock slapped against his stomach with every thrust of his hips, and the warm caress of the smooth leather caused an unbearable, mounting pressure in his balls. If only she would let him-

“Did I say you could stop pleasuring me?”

Lucius jerked to a sudden halt, practically sobbing with the effort of holding still, and lifted his cheek from where it rested against her inner thigh. His breath came out in ragged gasps and just as he finally got himself under control… “Oh, I didn’t say you could stop that either. I rather like it now that you've started.”

He did risk looking up then, panting, only to find her serious in her demands and thoroughly amused by them. With a whimper, Lucius returned to his task, both of them, working his tongue and lips over her clit as he desperately rutted against her heeled foot.

She laughed and moaned, a throaty sound that only aroused him further. “I never imagined Lucius Malfoy humping my leg like a dog… now that's a memory I'll treasure.”

A humiliating shudder rolled down Lucius’ spine. Clear fluid dribbled from his slit, running in rivulets down his shaft to smear between them, and served only to make the slick slide of his cock against her foot that much more delicious as he fucked himself against her with abandon. He teased her right to the brink and brought her back down countless times. The music of her pleasure was utter filth that shot straight to his throbbing cock, but he didn't dare touch himself. It would likely only anger her.

“That's enough,” she finally ground out, dropping her foot back to the floor, leaning forward, tangling her fingers in his hair, and pulling him to her in a heated battle of lips and tongues. They were both gasping when Hermione, at length, broke the kiss to press her forehead to his own, her eyes boring into his. Lucius was certain he would drown in the depths of her gaze. He was delirious, drunk on lust and the freedom of simply letting go and allowing her to be the one in control.

“Oh, I definitely want to fuck you.” She indicated with a slight nod over her shoulder. “Get on the bed, use that cleansing spell, you know the one, and prepare yourself for me. I want you ready when I return.”

Lucius’ voice was barely a whisper. “Yes, Mistress,” and with no hesitation, he scrambled quickly to the bed and grabbed the silver pot before reclining on his back with his knees in the air. Lucius dipped his fingers into the pot as he watched her disappear into the master bathroom and then concentrated on completing his task before she returned.
Something Borrowed

Chapter Notes

Hello lovely readers! It's time for a chapter that I've worked very hard on. It was kind of a writing exercise for me to see if I could do it, and I think it turned out pretty good. I'll be the first to admit it's a little out there, but part of my goal writing this story was to do things I hadn't seen before. And I haven't seen this. This chapter contains the surprise Hermione hinted at back when they were discussing likes/dislikes. If you're okay with all the tags I've tagged previously or just want to be shocked right along with Lucius, I urge you keep on reading. I think you'll like it. If you're a little iffy, I do have the spoiler tags listed at the end of the chapter, and since I broke it off of the previous one, it is skippable.

Also, a big thank you to TheTVJunkie for helping me out and answering a couple of questions I had!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hermione kicked off her heels and released a shuddering sigh as she leaned on the marble countertop, her reflection staring back at her. She still needed to get ready but a moment to collect her thoughts was necessary at this point. Taking complete control like this was a lot more work than she had thought it would be, but at least Lucius was experienced. It made her job easier.

She’d been afraid that she was laying it on too thick, but his first barely audible utterance of her chosen honorific had caused heat to pool low in her belly, her knickers suddenly soaking wet. His voice had been a perfect example of sheer reverence and she had failed to contain her shock, thankful that he couldn’t see it as he bowed before her. Hermione took a swig from the flask she had left on the counter and hastily unhooked her bra tossing it to the floor. The liquid burned a trail of fire down her throat and she grimaced at the taste.

Lucius certainly hadn’t been lying about his eagerness to please in his submissive role. She plucked the final piece of her outfit off the counter and put it on, thinking about how eagerly he had scampered to the bed to comply with her order. Hermione was still apprehensive about the reveal but if his behavior thus far was any indication, he was going to enjoy it.

With a final inspection of her appearance in the mirror, Hermione picked up the flask, and took one last deep breath to calm her nerves. She slipped back into her role and walked back to the bedroom. With wide, shocked eyes she hovered in the doorway, stopping to lean against the frame and simply enjoy the picture of debauchery her lover presented.

Needy little sounds snuck their way past his lips and three fingers sank in deep to the knuckle, as he twisted and thrust them to stretch himself out for her. His eyes cracked open and widened in surprise as he finally caught sight of her, propping himself up a bit on his elbow to get a better look. She held her breath, waiting for his reaction, and was pleased when his hand moved faster, and he added another finger.

They watched each other for a moment until she finally walked toward the bed, stopping in the middle of the room. Lucius removed his fingers, sliding gracefully to the floor, and crawled the remaining distance to her on hands and knees. He bowed low again, pressing his lips first to the top
of one foot and then the other, and then he knelt at her feet staring up in awe.

For the second time that night, Lucius was glad that Hermione had so thoughtfully caged his cock. He took in her appearance with ill-concealed want. His gaze darted briefly to the flask held loosely in her hand as she leaned against the door frame. He’d been capable of doing nothing but stare at her in shock and then he had worked his pinkie inside with a hiss, anticipating that with her inexperience and the size of the tool she had chosen, he would probably need the additional preparation. When she sighed in relief Lucius realized that she had been nervously awaiting his reaction, afraid that he might reject her desires, that he might reject her. While such games weren’t necessarily taboo, they tended be frowned upon within polite wizarding society, especially something like this which made it all the more appealing to him.

He slid to the floor as she began to walk to him, groaning as his cock jostled painfully with the movement. He crawled to her and halted at her feet, placing a reverential kiss to the instep of each foot as if worshipping at the altar of a goddess. Lucius gazed up in wonder as he marveled at the disconnect of her expressions gracing the familiar lines and angles of his own face.

His gaze wandered down the all too familiar body, to rest upon an appendage he knew only too well, caged like own, but the magic runes encircling the band were blue where his were green. Neither was it angry red and weeping pitifully. Lucius had always been quite proud of his assets, but from an outside perspective, the sizable length was slightly daunting. He was certainly no stranger to sucking cock, but it had been quite some time.

His tongue darted out to wet his lips, ready to attempt the challenge, eager to see if the taste was just as familiar. Granted, it wasn’t the easiest potion to brew, but why had none of his previous lovers ever thought to use Polyjuice? For that matter, why hadn't he? He had a potions master in his pocket after all, and he was rather gifted himself. He'd seriously been missing out.

Hermione tossed the flask onto the bed behind him, and reached down to caress his face. Staring up at himself was slightly surreal and yet, he had to admit, highly arousing. “Why did I choose this form, Lucius? Can you tell me?”

He looked up into her eyes, now stormy grey and dark, and wracked his brain for the answer, one that seemed to be stuck in his throat. “Because, uh- because…” His mind and body were screaming at him, both telling him contradictory information. Neither was wrong, and the resulting knowledge left him confused. He gave a little shake of his head to clear it, trying to focus on her question.

It was difficult. Her fingers playing in his hair were distracting him. His own face smirking down at him was distracting him. Then it came to him suddenly as his cock throbbed insistently, protesting its captivity. Lucius bowed his head with a low groan. How could he have forgotten?

“Because my body is yours...”

“And?” she prompted, tilting his chin up to draw his gaze back to her. Had his voice always sounded so low and husky or was it just her?

“And you decide what to do with it.”

Hermione smirked evilly. Being on the receiving end of it was rather chilling he decided. “That's good, Lucius. Now that we have that established, you may continue.”
Lucius opened his mouth about to say something, only to close it again, a slight frown creasing his brow. “Go ahead. What did you want to say?”

“Shall I address you as ‘Sir’ or shall I still call you ‘Mistress’?”

Hermione continued stroking his face as she considered his question. “Both have their appeal,” she replied, “but I like you knowing that it’s me, despite my appearance. You may continue with the latter.”

Lucius leaned into her caress but kept his gaze firmly fixed on her. “Thank you, Mistress. How would you like for me to serve you, Mistress?”

Long, elegant fingers wound into his hair. “Do you like sucking cock, Lucius?”

Short nails scratched against his scalp as he nodded slowly. He liked it almost as much as going down on a woman. Almost.

With the same devious smirk that Lucius often bestowed on her, Hermione replied in a low, demanding voice, “Show me how good you are, then.”

The effect of her command was immediate, and he dropped his head to rest against her thigh as he took a few unsteady breaths to calm himself.

“Yes, Mistress.”

He could feel his pulse beating rapidly in his long-neglected flesh and her words served only to increase the pace of its thundering. Lucius licked his lips, pulling the bottom one between his teeth and nuzzled against her thigh at the same time his hands began to run up and down her legs absentely. His thumbs stroked over her sensitive inner thighs and upwards to caress her hips on either side of his ultimate goal.

He didn’t dive straight for it, savoring the moment, building up the anticipation for both of them, and nibbled instead at the bend of one hip, at an inner thigh, tongue occasionally swiping across the flesh as his hand gently cupped the heavy balls before him. A quick squeeze and then it slid up to close around the hard shaft and give a languorous stroke. When he switched to her other hip, he made certain his warm breath washed over the sensitive cock-head and delighted in the quiver he felt in the muscles beneath his palm, and the whimper she tried unsuccessfully to stifle. Her hands were on his head, attempting to guide him where she wanted him, but Lucius was having none of it.

Lucius teased her without mercy until she gritted her teeth and snarled at him in frustration. He knew it was cruel to tease her so, but he just couldn’t help himself. He’d been deprived of this pleasure for far too long to simply rush through it. And it wasn’t as if he had to worry about her coming too soon; not with that matching ring. He would take his time and convince her of the necessity of playing this game in the future. And if she grew frustrated enough to just throw him down and fuck him into the floor, that was acceptable too.

Her fists tightened painfully in his hair as she tried to force his head back to center. He chuckled lowly, swiping his tongue over the weeping tip, probing into the slit momentarily, and delighting in her disappointed growl as he turned his head away. Lucius’ cock twitched at the sound, leaking onto the carpet beneath.

“Do I not please you, Mistress?” he asked, his voice a husky whisper, hand stroking slowly over the length before him.
Her eyes were hooded with lust, unfocused, and it took her a long while to respond. “You were supposed to be sucking my cock.”

Lucius shook his head, a small smile gracing his lips. “Forgive me, Mistress, but that isn’t quite true.”

His hands slid up her thighs, moving around to grip her arse and squeeze, digging fingers into flesh as he urged her forward. “You wanted me to show you how good I am. I think you’ll agree that ‘exceptional’ is the word you’re looking for.” His eyes drifted closed as his mouth finally closed around her, enveloping the velvety length, and drawing it slowly into the wet cavern of his mouth.

She brushed the hair away from his face, sweeping the disheveled platinum locks aside so she could watch him. Lucius glanced up briefly at this, holding her gaze over the span of several heartbeats before his eyes drifted closed again and he concentrated on his task.

He looked so natural on his knees, Hermione thought, cheeks hollowed as he moved back and forth over the blushing head. The feeling of arousal gathering low at the base of her spine was both familiar and foreign. It was nothing like she had thought it would be.

Lucius let himself be pulled forward with a hand on the back of his neck. Hermione forced her fingers to relax, to merely rest her hand against him. With the ring she didn’t have to worry about her inexperience putting an abrupt end to her plans before they had both had their fun. She watched Lucius work down the length of- Her? His? No-

She mentally stopped herself from going down that road. Lucius was accommodating a wish that he didn’t actually have to. Pronouns didn’t really matter right now, and if he wasn’t bothered, she wouldn’t let herself be either. Their mutual pleasure was what mattered, and Hermione pushed the thought from her mind, thrusting her hips forward gently, eager to feel more.

He employed every trick he knew that was guaranteed to drive her mad. It wasn’t long until her ragged moaning was a deep groan of need that prompted her to move a little faster. Lucius wanted desperately to stroke himself, turned on by her delightful, masculine sounds of pleasure, but his erection was far too sensitive for such stimulation at this point. Once the ring was removed, it would probably take mere moments for him to expend himself. He wanted to make certain she enjoyed the experience before that happened.

Lucius bobbed on the cock in his mouth expertly, paying special attention to the vein that ran the length of it and the underside of the head, knowing how sensitive he found that particular area himself. If she were using his body, he reasoned that she might enjoy the same things he did. That might even have been exactly what had prompted her little experiment. In fact, he was willing to take that bet. The fingers tangled in his blonde locks flexed sporadically as though unsure of what to do. Lucius’ tongue curled up, teasing at that one spot in particular that drove him wild.

Her hips jerked forward without warning, and Lucius choked as she unexpectedly thrust down his throat, his eyes going wide with the shock of it.

“Shit! Sorry. I didn't mean to,” she murmured trying to pull back.

Lucius grabbed onto Hermione’s hips to keep her in place. His eyes locked onto hers, brimming with unshed tears at the unexpected roughness. He quickly forced himself to relax around the intrusion, blinking back the tears, and swallowed before drawing back for a quick breath and taking her all the way in again. He moaned knowing the stimulation would be too much for her.

His actions had the desired effect. An experienced partner would have been hard pressed to
maintain control. Hermione didn't stand a chance. Lost in the pleasure, she used him like a toy, thrusting against his face with little regard for his comfort, not that he really minded. He wouldn't have pushed her to it if he did, and now that the game had changed Lucius wanted that feeling of being physically dominated that he usually only experienced with another man. Right now, Hermione fit the bill.

It was all he could do to keep up as she rammed down his throat repeatedly as deeply as possible. He was a drooling mess hanging onto her for dear life when suddenly, both her hands pressed hard against the back of his head, trapping him against her as she rocked against his face. Lucius began to feel a little light-headed from the lack of oxygen. He just knew his voice was going to be absolutely wrecked when it was over.

Hermione couldn’t hold back her sounds of pleasure, but neither did she want to. She didn’t have anything to compare it to, but even so, Lucius’ skill couldn’t be denied. She had always gagged horribly each time he had thrust too deeply, and she had never been able to take him the way he was doing now. Lucius’ throat seemed bottomless, and though he made a choked noise occasionally, he seemed able to control it, a fresh rush of saliva accompanying each small, involuntary sound of protest.

When he began humming lowly, she gasped from the sensation, certain she wouldn't be able to hold back despite her precautions with using the ring. The feeling was incredible; from the way he hollowed his cheeks and sucked hard, to the way he caressed the sac and pressed a slick digit just behind, and the way he kneaded the muscles of her arse urging her forward...

He was certainly exceptional, and she lost herself in the pleasure his mouth gave her borrowed body.

Hermione didn't even realize just how rough she was getting until Lucius began to struggle. Her eyes fluttered open, and she fought to concentrate, looking down to see his nose pressed against her groin, his jaw wide, brow deeply furrowed with the strain. Reluctantly, she let him go.

Lucius pushed away from her, licking his lips, breathing hard, and looking thoroughly wrecked. His voice was hoarse when he finally spoke, gravelly, breaking when he repeated his question. “Do I please you, Mistress?”

“Yes, you please me, Lucius,” she replied, caressing his cheek gently.

It was still red where she had struck him earlier and she resisted the urge to redden it further. They were no longer playing that game. He really didn't even have to keep calling her 'Mistress', but he seemed to like it, so she didn't bother correcting him. Instead, she leaned down, drawing him in for a kiss. He parted his lips eagerly for her, letting her tongue slip inside his mouth to twine with his own.

“You are so incredibly good at that. Exceptional indeed,” she murmured against his mouth and he visibly puffed up at the compliment.

She continued caressing his face and asked, “So, what do you say, Lucius? Would you like me to fuck you now?”

He nodded enthusiastically. “Absolutely, Mistress.”

Hermione pulled him to his feet and drew him close, their twin bodies pressed together intimately.
Lucius whimpered at the contact, a clear indication of his discomfort, but ground his erection against her anyway, catching her lips in a desperate, bruising kiss. It was, however; abundantly clear to Hermione that unlike in the memory, Lucius was not the one in control here.

He followed her lead instead, accepting rather than demanding. The placement of his hands on her shoulders as his fingers curled against her skin felt more than anything like a question to her, asking permission for his tentative touches. Even his posture was off. Where normally he was imposing and intimidating, tucked against her as he was, he felt almost fragile in her arms. And even though his kisses bruised her lips, he pressed himself closer to her rather than attempt to draw her near in a way she could only describe as needy. His singular, bold action was to reach down between them and take her in hand.

Hermione allowed it to continue for several languorous strokes before she placed her hand flat against his chest and began pushing him gently, yet insistently backwards toward the bed. When the backs of Lucius’ knees hit the edge, he tumbled onto the mattress, bringing her down with him on top of his sprawled form. She captured his lips again, pushing him down with that same hand on his chest and holding him in place, then let her lips and tongue wander, sucking on his collarbone, biting and licking both nipples, and dipping her tongue into his navel.

He writhed below her, hands fisted in her silken hair, cursing and murmuring incoherent words of encouragement as she mapped out the familiar contours of his body. His encouraging words turned into quiet sobbing as she sucked gently on the sensitive tip of his cock. His heavy flesh slapped against his flat belly when she let him fall from her mouth, and jumped slightly as she dragged the flat of her tongue down the underside towards the ring keeping him so needy for her. When she lapped coquettishly at his testicles, he reacted instinctively, crying out loud, bucking his hips, and pushing at her shoulder, clearly overwhelmed by the stimulation and at the same time needing more.

“No...,” he whined, begging in a breathy whimper, "Please no more teasing."

So quickly that it made her head spin, he turned over onto his stomach, drew his knees up beneath himself, and lowered his chest to the mattress, face tucked into the crook of his arm, presenting himself to her.

“Please just fuck me already,” he whispered, and his raw desperation was like a shock of cold water.

Suddenly, Hermione understood exactly why Lucius was so careful about who saw him like this. They had been sleeping together for months now. This was new. Despite all they had done previously, she didn’t recognize this Lucius begging on his knees. This Lucius was a far cry from the man who had, until only recently, been the bane of her existence and something different even than the man she had been dealing with all Easter break. This man kneeling before her was not the Lucius who had so recently humiliated Umbridge in front of the student body, and yet she knew that had been Lucius too. His crash course in power dynamics had felt too real to her to be nothing more than a show.

His public face wasn’t just a mask to protect the Lucius before her now. They were polar opposites, but they were both Lucius Malfoy. How difficult had it been, she wondered, for him to reconcile the conviction that Malfoys didn’t take orders and didn’t beg with the fact that he did in such a way?

It hadn’t dawned on her earlier just how much he was trusting her, how vulnerable his position was. Wizarding Britain was unnecessarily staid she had discovered long ago when the public eye had first been turned towards her. Majority opinion held far too much sway and Lucius was not
only the head of an influential company, he was also the current patriarch of a powerful and ancient wizarding family. If this got out, his carefully cultivated public persona might never recover from the blow. His trust in her to keep his secret was nearly overwhelming.

She picked up the small flask, nearly hidden in the bedsheets beside her. It wasn’t time for another dose yet, but the last thing she wanted was an unplanned transformation whilst in the middle of… certain activities, so she unstoppered the flask, took a sip, and tossed it aside after closing it tightly.

Hermione ran her hands over his taut buttocks, first one firm globe and then the other, feeling the muscles quiver beneath her touch, and gave him a playful smack before leaning forward to bite. She grinned when he gasped, jerking slightly.

Lucius realized belatedly the kind of playful mood that Hermione was in. The bite surprised him. As much as she liked sinking her teeth into him he should have seen it coming, the Polyjuice making her bold in a way she hadn't been previously. Elegant fingers, familiar fingers, and wasn't that a surreal experience, to recognize his own hand and at the same time know it wasn't him, reached between his legs, grasped his aching flesh, and drew it back. He tried to squirm away from the warm mouth that sucked him in again, and received a warning swat for his efforts. Lucius did his best to remain still, wondering just how much more he could possibly take.

His muscles strained with the effort of holding still for her, and Hermione rewarded that effort by rubbing her thumb over Lucius’ slick entrance. Time stood still, and Lucius' head snapped up as she sucked particularly hard, let him go, and then sank two fingers into him slowly. The inexorable push forward made his toes curl. With a low, nearly inaudible moan, he spread his knees farther apart, causing his hips to wriggle a bit and his muscles to clutch at her fingers. He felt ready, but she wasn’t sure, recalling her own initial discomfort the first time he had taken her this way.

She reached over, snatching up the pot and the precious lubricant inside that had eased Lucius’ passage into her. Coating herself liberally with the liquid, she continued moving her fingers in and out of him, listening to the small sounds of pleasure he made and trying to recall the memory she had witnessed of Lucius and Professor Snape together. He was already in much the same position he had been in then, aside from being held down, so she gripped the curve of his waist with one hand while using the other to guide herself into place.

It was more difficult than she had realized, the head slipping against him so that all she managed to do was thrust against the cleft of his arse causing them both to moan. After the second failed attempt, Lucius reached back, took hold, and guided her inside.

“Oh fuck,” he groaned, and Hermione echoed his sentiment a moment later as she squeezed her eyes tightly shut, nearly going cross-eyed from the sensation. His tight passage squeezed her like a vise, smoldering hot as she sank into him blissfully. Too quickly, if the sound of his sharp gasp was anything to judge by.

“Sorry,” she murmured, beginning to pull back, until his hand shot backwards, and he gripped her hip tightly.

“No! No, don't fucking move!” he pleaded almost frantically.

She stayed where she was, fully seated, her pelvis pressed intimately against the curve of his arse. She rested her forehead on his back, the silky strands of her hair falling around her face, savoring the feeling of him surrounding her as she gripped his waist tightly. Hermione let out a deep, shuddering breath across his skin. No wonder Lucius normally paused for a bit whenever their positions were reversed. She was finding it difficult to maintain control and not begin thrusting forward wildly.
When Lucius moved his knees, adjusting his position beneath her, she lost the tenuous hold on her control, and tightened her grip on his waist, slamming into him. He released a sharp cry as she set a furious, unrestrained pace, futilely chasing an orgasm currently denied to her, and he met her every thrust with a strangled moan. Hermione wound her fingers in the hair at the nape of his neck, pushing his head down, and holding him there.

Lucius’ eyes rolled back. He struggled beneath her as she pounded him into the mattress. He’s rarely been fucked so brutally, the newness of her experience aiding the vicious drive of her hips. Her lips found the crook of his neck and she kissed him there, a deceptively tender caress even as she continued to fuck him ruthlessly. The pleasure was a slow burn, a fire that wouldn't catch. She kept missing his prostate, and every effort to reposition himself was met with the brutal thrust of her hips, knocking him off balance and the air from his lungs. His entire body quivered beneath her and he sobbed with need when she slowed and bit down into his shoulder, tongue licking at his flesh.

“So, tell me, Lucius,” her voice was so low and husky that it seemed to rumble in her chest, “this can be done face-to-face, right?”

Lucius didn’t say a word, nodding vigorously instead, and Hermione slid out of him with a groan as he flipped onto his back below her. He looked up at her, a mirror image of himself, skin flushed and glistening, breath coming just as harshly as his own.

He spread his legs allowing her to settle between them, and Hermione braced one hand on the mattress beside him to keep from putting her full weight on top of him. It probably wasn’t an issue considering they were the same size, but she knew from experience just how heavy Lucius was.

She noticed he avoided touching his aching cock, lying flat and angry against his belly, even though he clearly wanted to. His hand would move towards it only to be snatched back at the last moment and land somewhere else. She didn’t blame him. Her own erection was driving her mad and he had been bound far longer than she had.

He lifted his hips to wrap his legs around her waist and guided her inside once more with a groan. She found her rhythm quickly. This time her pace was nowhere near as vicious. Desperate hands pulled her down for a sloppy kiss, a delicious little thrill running down her spine at the thought of how they must look together. She felt his knees loosen on her sides, then he pushed her away slightly, hooking one leg over her forearm.

“Higher,” he pleaded, nudging her wrists and she obliged, planting both hands against the back of his knee and pushing his leg up towards his chest.

It made Lucius sob, a pained expression on his face, his breath hitching in his throat as he swallowed convulsively. Concerned, Hermione was just about to ask if he was okay, but then she shifted slightly, and he whimpered, letting out a particularly poignant moan at the change in angle. Realizing what he had just helped her find, Hermione worked against that spot until he was pleading for her to let him come.

Skin slick with exertion, Hermione let go of his leg, letting it hook over her shoulder, ran a hand
down his sweaty chest, and then reached down carefully, loosening Lucius’ ring with a touch. Her hand closed around him, and then she watched as he unraveled below her. Seconds after his release from the ring, he howled, his climax savage and intense.

Hermione didn’t think she had ever seen so much come out of him. His body convulsed, squeezing her tightly as he whimpered, his twitching cock coating both their bellies. His release was so violent it shot all the way up his chest and neck to splash across his face and onto his lower lip, his tongue darting out to taste it. The entire time his muscles clenched around her so tightly, she struggled to breath.

A shout and she was loosening her own ring, thrusting harder and grunting at the tightening in her lower back and balls and the unfamiliar sensation of flooding Lucius’ insides with the same milky fluid he had just coated them both in. Hermione rode out her intense orgasm, bracing her hand on his chest to support her weight, smearing Lucius’ spend into his sparse chest hair in the process. She shuddered with the aftershocks, hips stuttering to a halt. Her softening flesh slipping from him, she dropped to the bed next to Lucius, both of them gasping to catch their breath.

She was still coming down from her high when Lucius tucked his hair behind his ear and leaned over her without a word. He kissed her stomach, licking her clean as though enjoying a favored treat before capturing her mouth in a tender kiss that seemed to go on forever. Hermione sighed when he released her, propping himself on his elbow to gaze down into her eyes. He caressed her cheek and let his hand wander down her chest to gently rest on her hip.

“You’re unbelievable,” he said in wonder.

Hermione favored him with a wolfish grin and gestured towards herself. “Are you sure you aren’t just saying that because of the packaging? I'll wager you watch yourself wank in the mirror.”

He grinned back. “I've never been one to care overly much about the packaging.”

"Sorry if it was awkward. My curiosity got the better of me and I didn't have a lot of options for hair donors." She watched him study her intently. “Is it strange?”

“A bit,” he admitted. “You look like me and you sound like me,” he raised an eyebrow, “and I think you taste like me too,” then he touched her cheek again. “The strange part is that I can still see you. Did you plan this? Where did you get the potion anyway?”

Hermione stretched, running a hand over his arm. "No, I bought a perfectly good toy to play with, only now I'll have to save it for later. The thought never entered my mind until you showed me that memory."

"You just… had it?" he asked, brow creased in confusion.

She nodded. "I started carrying a blank. Now I'll need a new one. It was definitely worth it though."

"But, did you steal it from Severus?"

Her smirk grew even more devilish. “A few ingredients, sure, but I brewed it myself. Do you think he would really leave that sort of thing lying about for a student to get ahold of?”

Lucius' mouth went slack in surprise. “There aren’t many fully trained wizards who could brew that. It takes more than time. It takes a delicate hand.”

He looked rather impressed, Hermione thought, and laughed inwardly as she imagined his reaction
to her next bit of news.

“How much more impressed would you be,” she questioned, running her fingertips lightly down his chest, “if I told you that I started brewing it when I was thirteen?”

His eyes widened in shock as he reassessed her anew. She couldn’t be serious. Could she? Certainly not. Not a child of thirteen. The margin of error on that potion was- Lucius swallowed a small moan as her fingers finished wandering down his chest and began to play in the short thatch of hair between his legs. He didn’t think it was possible after what they had just done, but somehow, his cock gave a valiant little twitch in response to her confession before lying dormant again.

“That’s what I thought. Looks like I’m not the only one who gets off with a book between their legs.” He really hoped he didn't sound that annoyingly smug all the time.

She traced a finger up the underside of his spent cock. "For Salazar's sake, witch," he hissed. "You do realize that two is the exception rather than the rule?"

"Shame," she murmured, dropping her hand. "You seemed to enjoy yourself. I wanted to see what all the fuss was about."

Lucius released a shaky sigh and swallowed thickly. Now he really wished he wasn't utterly spent.

"Hmm, though I suppose I couldn't either. Wasn't expecting that."

"Why do you think I spend so much time on foreplay?" Lucius smirked.

"I thought maybe you were being nice," Hermione replied in a snarky tone, though her attention was clearly wandering. She gave him a toothy grin, and leaned over to smack him on the arse. It was more sound than sting.

Lucius arched an eyebrow. "Must you really?"

She laughed. "You like it."

He found that he couldn't argue with that, conceding that he actually did, with her anyway. Maybe it was her enthusiasm, or the way she was so open with him, so raw. He didn't really know, but he wasn't really thinking overly hard about it either.

"Come on," and she sat up suddenly, crawling over him unnecessarily to get out of bed, pausing to nip playfully at his throat. "You're positively filthy. Let's go get you cleaned up."

Lucius watched as she casually strolled towards the en suite bathroom, his gaze drifting lazily over the naked flesh on display, and he tilted his head in appreciation. He really did have quite a nice arse. Perhaps he could forgive her for always wanting to swat it.

He followed her, his legs as wobbly as a newly born foal's. The shower was already running, steam filling the room, and he opened the door, stepping in behind her. She had her back to him, water cascading down her hair to run in rivulets over broad shoulders. Lucius slipped his arm around Hermione's waist, moving hair clinging wetly to skin aside so that he could press his lips to that spot where shoulder met neck. He heard a sigh of contentment and pulled her back against him with a grin.

This was a new experience for him too. His previous encounters with other men never led to them
ending up in the shower together, not that he was actually with another man now, but that was an unimportant distinction. In his mind he knew who was there with him, but there was nothing feminine about the body in his arms. He reached for the shampoo, lamenting his inability to rise to the occasion again. Their brief time together was well and truly over after tonight, and he wished now that he hadn't put her off for so long, but she had needed the time to learn. He didn't regret that.

Lucius smiled as she turned her head for a long, sensuous kiss. He may have missed out this time, but it did give him something tangible to look forward to the next time they met.

Chapter End Notes

Spoiler tag: Lucius/Hermione (polyjuiced as Lucius). Hermione is the dominant partner.
It's been a while lovely readers. My slow-ass muse took her sweet time on this one. Unfortunately, that's not going to improve going forward. I started a new job! Better financial security. Yay!! Far less time for writing. Boo!!! And the next chapter needs a lot of work, but I hope you enjoy this one in the meantime!

This time when Lucius side-along apparated her to the train station, Hermione had been forced to tear herself away from him with a murmured, "I have to go."

When she had hurried from their little tucked away alcove, the ghost of his kiss tingling on her lips, she hadn't heard the sound of him disapparating, but she hadn't dared to turn around and check. She would never have made the train if she had turned to look back at him. Leaving him, putting their little interlude behind her and returning to the real world was harder than she had anticipated.

Her train ride back to Hogwarts was uneventful. She watched the scenery pass by, but her thoughts were directed inward towards the amazing, almost two weeks she had spent with Lucius. Yes, they had hit a few rocky patches, but save for her inability to master Occlumency, Hermione considered the venture a success. She did wish that she had been able to figure that bit out, considering it was the primary reason she had spent her holiday with Lucius in the first place, but just because she hadn't been successful yet did not mean that she was going to give up on it.

Harry, Ron, and Ginny were out playing a pickup game of quidditch when she got back to Gryffindor tower. It gave her the opportunity to slip up to her room so that she could unpack in peace. That was the plan anyway. She was less than ten minutes into unpacking when the door flung open, three of her four roommates bursting into the room like a whirlwind.

"Well? Your mystery man? Did you see him?" Parvati asked.

"You did, didn't you?" Lily smirked at her conspiratorially. The other girl was really starting to come out of her shell. Given that she loved discussing her sex life, Hermione wasn't certain how she felt about it.

"Of course she did," Lavender chimed in. "O.W.L.s are in just a few weeks. Do you think she'd go otherwise?"

"I haven't the time for this. You three know I'm trying to get settled back in, right?" Hermione waved a hand over her things spread out on the bed.

Lily snatched up a stack of clothes. She at least knew better than to touch the books. "Well, we can help with that, and then you can tell us everything."

Hermione shook her head at the three girls as they set about repacking her drawers. She didn't mind the gossiping as she would have once. Even Lavender wasn't annoying as she had once been, though Hermione suspected that had a lot to do with her being uninterested in Ron and no challenge for Lavender so long as she was taken with her mystery man. Lavender was doing everything she could to encourage Hermione in that regard. She really didn't mind swapping stories
with the girls, but she definitely would not be telling her nosy roommates everything.

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Lucius stood in the alcove gazing at her retreating form, mesmerized by the determined bounce of her soft curls as she walked away from him. There was no good reason he stood transfixed once she disappeared from view, nor when the Hogwarts Express blew the whistle for final boarding. The sound finally roused him from his thoughts and with a small shake, Lucius disapparated landing in the middle of his study.

His holiday with Hermione had been a balm he hadn't known he'd needed. He recognized he'd been on a path to self destruction even with Severus' help. The short reprieve had come at just the right time, only now the manor felt colder and more empty than ever. He poured himself a glass of scotch, knocking it back quickly to ward off the chill creeping in. It didn't actually help since the chill wasn't physical, but the fire pooling in his stomach was enough to almost fool him for a while.

The second glass he sipped slowly, grimacing as he gingerly took his seat behind his massive desk. Hermione might be gone now, but he would be reminded of her recent presence for a couple of days still. Lucius chuckled lightly. She had wielded her chosen tool with more vigor than he had planned for.

With a cold and empty manor, there was nothing to do but throw himself back into his work. The horcruxes were still out there, and they had made so terribly little progress since beginning their journey together.

Lucius opened his ledger, staring down at the page before him, and trying to decide where to start. The locket was the better bet. With the locket they at least knew what they were looking for. The issue now lay in finding it.

He barely remembered Regulus Black. The man, boy really, he recalled was hungry. Driven. Lucius had regarded him as the future of the Dark Lord's chosen for those reasons, and then he had disappeared. Now he knew why, and though he hadn't expressed his concerns to Hermione, the knowledge of what had most likely happened to the youngest Black terrified him. Sirius had already been disowned at the time of Regulus' disappearance which had made him the heir. It didn't bode well for his own family's fate if his betrayal was discovered. The Dark Lord it seemed had no qualms about disposing of pure-blood heirs if they got in the way of his plans. He was never more glad that Draco was out of the country.

Lucius thought about the problem critically. No one knew what had become of Regulus though it stood to reason that he had managed to flee the cave. There was no evidence contradicting that theory at least. Nothing had seemed out of place when he had been there.

The questions, and there were many, were what had happened after the cave. Had Regulus managed to destroy it? Had the Dark Lord taken it back and hidden it somewhere else? Was it sitting in Grimmauld Place waiting to be found?

If it was in the Black ancestral home it was out of his reach, and he would have to wait the few short weeks until the end of term for Hermione to gain access to the place. Lucius made a note in his ledger. It wouldn't hurt to assign someone to retrace Regulus' last steps. His newest employee with her ministry connections might be the ideal candidate. He had been wondering what to do with her.

Lucius frowned down at his notes. As for his side of things, it would be far too dangerous to seek the information from the Dark Lord himself. He would still need to tread carefully, but Bellatrix
might prove a suitable alternative. If anyone knew whether Regulus Black had been found out, it
would be her. He scrubbed a hand over his face in irritation. The last thing he wanted was to deal
with that woman, especially after what she had put him through.

He worked well into the night finally stopping around two in the morning when he dozed off and
nearly knocked over his inkwell. Lucius rubbed at his tired eyes, pushing back his chair to stand. If
he could no longer keep his eyes open it was as good a time to stop as any.

A quick shower and Lucius slipped beneath the clean, crisp sheets, the earlier coldness of the
manor creeping back in to his awareness. He slept fitfully, his large bed achingly empty. The
tossing and turning didn't stop until a familiar scent tickled his senses.

Cresta held her breath, looking on anxiously as her Master dragged the pillow closer with a soft
sigh. He was deeply asleep at last when she quietly slipped from the room.

Hermione tried to keep her mind clear, lamenting that they had Potions class on Mondays as she
stepped across the threshold into the dank classroom. She thought that even a day or two of seeing
him around the castle would have been sufficient to reconcile her professor with Lucius' memory of
the man. Potions class was on Monday though, and she wouldn't get a reprieve before having to
face Severus Snape.

She took out her parchment, quill, and ink, arranging them neatly on the desk as she always did
while she waited for class to start. Suddenly, her hand flew to her mouth and she gasped. What if
Professor Snape sensed something was amiss? Would he actually use Legilimency on her? She
wouldn't know if he did. Well, not until the shock showed on his face anyway.

"Hey, everything okay?" Neville asked, the concern in his voice obvious.

"Yes! No, I- everything's fine. Just, I thought I forgot something." She beamed at him, nodding
eagerly, and hoping that he was convinced.

He seemed to be. He continued on to his seat at any rate, and she heard Ron mutter, "Completely
mental," under his breath as he walked by a second later. Evidently he had witnessed the exchange
and found nothing out of the ordinary, but Ron also wasn't as observant as Professor Snape.

The man in question breezed into the room not a minute later in his usual dramatic fashion, all
billowing robes and irritated scowl. She kept her head down when he barked at them to open their
books, turning dutifully to the page in question.

Concentrating on Professor Snape’s lesson proved a difficult feat. She kept seeing his hands
roaming over Lucius' skin, kept hearing his low groans of pleasure, and kept remembering that he
was not only her professor. When she caught herself staring between his legs, she quickly buried
her nose in a textbook, hiding her reddened face in its pages as the sound of his voice washed over
her.

His lecture seemed to pass by in a blur. If asked, she would have been hard pressed to repeat back
any of it, too preoccupied with the thoughts racing through her mind. He had caught her staring,
she just knew he had, because he had been looking curiously in her direction when she had realized
just where her eyes had landed.

Severus found himself distracted by the girl's odd behavior. His gaze kept flicking in her direction
throughout his lecture. She wasn't behaving as she normally would.
In the past her hand would have been perpetually in the air, waving about as if she were hailing a taxi. And after they had begun her private lessons her answers to his questions were less maniacally enthused, but she was still engaged. He didn't think she was even listening to him today.

It was certainly an odd departure for her.

He kept her in his periphery as they began to brew, and she seemed to settle down well enough once she had a task to occupy her attention. Every so often he caught her glance in his direction and turn beet red in the moment before she resumed her work.

At last he made his way over to her table, standing just out of her line of sight, and observed while she worked. He saw nothing wrong with her skills. Her potion was coming along admirably. Something else was the issue then.

"Miss Granger?" She started abruptly. Evidently she hadn't realized he was there.

"Professor?" He heard her swallow audibly, her eyes darting about.

"You will remain after class, Miss Granger."

She ducked her head and murmured her acknowledgement, and with a decisive nod, Severus moved on. Her strange behavior had peaked his curiosity, and he would get to the bottom of it one way or another.

Hermione watched the other students file out of the classroom enviously. She cursed Lucius for showing her that memory even if it had eventually led to an unbelievable experience. Professor Snape stood in the doorway of his store room, arms crossed as he waited, one hand holding his wand and the other clutching two small ingredient vials. Harry was the last out, and he gave her a reassuring smile before Professor Snape shut the door on him and locked it with a wave of his wand. He hadn't even bothered uncrossing his arms.

"Is there a problem I should know about, Miss Granger?" he questioned with one eyebrow arched as he looked her over carefully.

"No, of course not, Professor." She was, however, unable to meet his shrewd gaze and knew that alone made her look rather guilty. "I've just been a bit preoccupied. Thinking about O.W.L.s at end of term, I guess."

The vials in his hand clinked together lightly, and he turned back to finish reshelving them without responding to her terrible attempt at deflection. From the corner of her eye, she saw him pluck something from the shelf and carry it back over. He sat down across from her, arms crossed on the table between them, and stared at her with that penetrating gaze he was so well-known for. She hoped that was all it was.

With deliberate care he set first one item and then a second on the battered wooden surface without saying a word. He crossed his arms again and waited patiently for her to connect the dots. Hermione looked down at the powered pearl and the syrup of hellebore he had placed on the table and met his gaze directly for the first time, brows narrowed in a glare.

"Professor, what's the meaning of this? That's illegal."

His eyebrow lifted once again. "I am pleased you note the significance, Miss Granger. Perhaps I simply wished to ascertain whether your lessons were a waste of my time."
She didn't think that likely. Both ingredients had many varied uses, and were innocuous enough, but taken together, in the context of their conversation, they pointed to one potion only. Veritaserum. The unspoken meaning was clear enough.

"It's nothing to do with you, Professor. Really, it's not. I've just been distracted."

"I'd say more than distracted. You haven't been your usual, irritating self in class today."

There was some slight affection in his tone, even though he sounded his familiar, surly self, and Hermione took it for the compliment it was. She wouldn't have noticed the difference otherwise. They had managed to reach a sort of understanding of one another since her lessons had begun. He pushed her in class as he always did though he wasn't acerbic or cruel, but then she wasn't her usual insufferable self either. She no longer felt the need to prove herself in such a way.

He rolled his eyes dramatically before continuing. "As a point of fact, Mr. Weasley answered more questions than you, though not by much."

She smiled softly. Ron had responded exactly twice and he hadn't exactly volunteered his input. "You really don't want to hear about it, Professor. I'm sure I'll be irritating you in class again in no time at all."

"As much as I loath asking, if there is an issue with a student, I do have a responsibility to address it."

He knew something was amiss, and he wasn't going to drop the issue until he was satisfied it had been addressed. She needed something believable for her to be worried about, something big enough to distract her from her classes, and she needed to come up with it quickly.

"Did you always want to be a professor?"

"I fail to see how that is relevant, Miss Granger."

Hermione fingered the vial of powdered pearl absently. "Professor McGonagall wants to meet with me later in the week to discuss careers. I assume you're doing the same with the Slytherin students."

"Correct," he agreed.

She rolled the vial across the table, listening to the sound it made against the wood. "You know, everyone seems to have some idea of what they want after graduation. I'm still not sure."

He covered the glass, caging it with his large hand, a pained look on his face, due to her ill treatment of his precious materials. "Might I suggest avoiding politics, then? Or alternatively, become a more accomplished liar. You've had your eye on the Minister for Magic's office since first year. Don't try to deny it."

Hermione realized that the more she tried to deflect, the harder he was going to press the issue, convinced there was something there. She was nowhere near good enough to fool him. Across the table from her, his eyes practically pleaded for her to simply tell him what she was hiding so that he could stop asking.

It was a last ditch effort, but she figured it wouldn't hurt to try. At this rate, Professor Snape would be looking in her head soon if she didn't convince him of something, so she generously sprinkled a bit of truth over her lies just as Lucius might have done.
"I didn't want to tell you. It's just, I've just been thinking a lot about... sex."

He scrambled backwards as though she had just told him she was diseased. The stool screeched and fell over with a loud crash in the process. A horrified look settled on his face and Hermione covered her mouth with a gasp, realizing what he must be thinking, what her behavior in class pointed towards. "Oh, no I didn't mean- not with you, Professor. That would be highly inappropriate."

"Yes, I should most certainly think so." He was looking anywhere but at her, disturbed by the turn the conversation had taken.

"It's just that I've sort of been seeing someone and we were together over the holidays and-"

"Oh, Merlin's beard. Please tell me you're not pregnant." He actually looked as though he would be sick.

"No! Of course not. We used protection. I mean I almost forgot the first time, but-"

"No! That is quite enough, Miss Granger." He took a deep, fortifying breath and released it.

"I thought you wanted to know what the problem was."

He pinched the bridge of his nose wearily. "Want is such a terribly strong word. Compelled might be more accurate. Why then were you... your behavior in class..."

"I was afraid you would be disappointed. I should be focused on my studies." It wasn't exactly a lie, she didn't want to disappoint him, it just hadn't been what was on her mind.

Professor Snape released an exasperated sigh. "You're also sixteen, Miss Granger. Even the swottiest of us are not immune to being... hormonal teenagers."

The way he practically growled out the last two words made Hermione wonder how often he had to have "the talk" with said hormonal teenagers. Clearly it was more often than he was comfortable with.

"If you should feel the urge to discuss this in the future, then this is perhaps something to discuss with Madam Pomfrey. She is certainly more qualified to deal with it."

He set about tidying the room, steadfastly ignoring her and not even bothering to be subtle about it. It was a clear dismissal. She gathered her things quietly and left him to it.

Hermione decided the ability and willingness to carry on as though absolutely nothing was wrong was a Slytherin trait, because it was one that both Lucius and Professor Snape shared. Potions class on Thursday of that week was business as usual. He didn't ignore her, but he didn't pay any special attention to her either.

The same was true for her private lesson on Friday. Neither of them brought up the topic again, just as she had hoped would be the case, but his taciturn demeanor had softened somewhat. Hermione found herself looking forward to her private lessons again with the awkwardness seemingly behind them. She was relieved because she enjoyed the work.

They were well into N.E.W.T. level concepts working from the sixth year book, though Hermione had noticed Professor Snape never instructed her from it. He didn't even have his own copy out
while they worked. She didn't know if he even had a copy. It was what made her realize that he had never taught from the text in class either. Even though he told them to open their books, he never read from one during his lectures.

Rarely he would leave the instruments put away and instead they would have tea and discuss theory, rather advanced theory, until well past the time they would normally adjourn for the evening. Professor Snape was brilliant and so much more animated during these discussions that Hermione was always reluctant for them to end.

Harry and Ron didn't understand how she could spend so much of her time with Professor Snape. They, of course, still hated him. He was no nicer to them in class than he had ever been and so it was difficult, impossible really, for her to change their minds. They would never believe that Professor Snape wasn't as bad as they thought and they would never understand how she had begun to think of him as a friend.

The common room of Gryffindor tower was quite busy that weekend, teeming with fifth year students who thought it was more prudent to study than go into the village. She assumed it was because many of them had the potions portion of their O.W.L.s on Monday and Professor Snape was sitting in to observe. He hadn't said anything to the effect, but there was a rumor going around that any student that embarrassed him by performing poorly would earn a month's worth of detentions restocking the most vile and foul-smelling ingredients in the potions storeroom.

Hermione shook her head with a little laugh and scratched Crookshanks behind the ears where he lay in her lap. She was grateful Harry and Ron had looked after him during the Easter holidays, but she had missed him while she was away.

“What's funny?” Harry asked, looking over at her from the nearby couch.

“Rumors,” she replied. "How do they even get started?"

Harry looked around the room and laughed too. "No idea, the imaginations of scared first-years probably."

As much as he hated Professor Snape, even he didn't believe it was true.

"Actually, I had a bit of a hand in it." Ginny plopped down onto the couch next to her, an impish smirk on her face.

"Really? Why?"

"Well, I didn't really mean to start all this," she replied, gesturing to indicate the chaos in the room, "but I was mad at Ron, he was being an arse, and then the twins just ran with it."

"Because of course they did," though she could certainly see the appeal now given Professor Snape’s reaction to her hinted at holiday adventures. Hermione smiled to herself again. The incident had finally made her see why Lucius enjoyed giving him such a hard time. He was normally so composed that his sudden and real alarm was unexpectedly humorous. It had taken everything she had to not burst out laughing while gathering her things.

Their conversation quickly turned to inter-house gossip instead, causing Harry to groan loudly and make a quick exit. Hermione could tell from their conversation that Ginny had no idea she was even involved with someone. Maybe her roommates could be trusted after all. She was glad, because she still had no idea how Ginny would react to the news that she was sleeping with Lucius
Lucius didn't know if he could take another moment of the farce he found himself in. He had lost track of the number of people congratulating him on his last performance, how it was an inspired piece of work, or how they should consider dabbling in something of the like themselves. Most evidently hadn't heard about what happened after.

Bellatrix, the bitch, knew. She kept shooting him knowing looks from across the room. He wanted to strangle her with his bare hands, but he couldn't, she was favored and therefore off-limits, so he settled for drinking instead. As he quickly downed his fourth drink, Lucius idly wondered at what point he would be too drunk to keep his secrets intact. It was a dangerous game he was playing. He thought he should probably consider stopping before he got that far.

They had all been summoned, and no one knew why. Lucius glanced in Bellatrix's direction again. He was convinced that she knew, but she wasn't telling. It was risky given how much he had already had to drink, but he decided now was a good opportunity to chance it. He might not get another chance to try and find out if she knew anything useful about Regulus’ disappearance.

He dipped inside her mind and found himself mired in a rat maze of chaos. Her thoughts were disjointed and disorganized, but he pressed onward, digging deeper for any hint of the fate that had befallen her cousin. As he searched her mind grew more disturbing, and he encountered more and more memories of himself the deeper he went.

Lucius had always known that her gaze had been trained on him. Since their early childhood he had felt it. He hadn't realized just how deeply her obsession with him ran.

Until now.

He pulled from her mind abruptly, attempting not to let his shock show in his face. She was more dangerous than he had believed. Unlike Hermione's amusing fantasies, Bellatrix didn't seem to know what was real and what was not. She saw his performances for the Dark Lord as a sort of calling, and as far as she was concerned he was abandoning it. She wasn't going to stop just because she had been ordered to. She was merely biding her time.

The customary hush that announced the Dark Lord's arrival fell over the room. Fear coiled in Lucius' stomach, mixing with the alcohol already there, and the disturbing news he had just learned. He leaned more heavily on his cane, fingers gripping the serpent head tightly, and tried not to be sick as he hurriedly put his thoughts back in order.

The Dark Lord drifted through his followers, there was really no other word to describe it, and sat upon his throne as though he were a king surveying his kingdom. His eyes came to rest on Lucius and the crowd around him parted leaving him feeling utterly exposed. He didn't dare look away as the Dark Lord beckoned him forward with a skeletal hand. Ever so slowly, Lucius stepped forward and knelt before the throne.

Lucius felt the Dark Lord crash against his Occlumency shields, and he struggled beneath the force of his attack. He had no idea what the other wizard was even looking for, and as a result had no idea which memories to twist and distort. A moment of blind panic seized him before he hurriedly started dragging out every terrible memory as a result of that awful night and holding it up to the light for the Dark Lord's perusal. He would just have to hope the raw memories would be disturbing enough to placate his lord.
The confrontation with Severus was what finally did it. In his mind, Lucius struggled against the ropes that held him as Severus forced the potion down his throat, and the Dark Lord withdrew in the moments before that memory went dark.

For the first time in what felt like forever, Lucius heard the Dark Lord speak inside his mind. *I see that Severus did not exaggerate. Are you more yourself now, Lucius?*

*Yes, my Lord,* he replied. *I stand ready to serve.*

The Dark Lord lingered for another few moments, and then withdrew completely. Lucius shuddered with relief as the Dark Lord turned to the rest of his followers. He rose as unobtrusively as possible and melted back into the crowd.

The dark wizard was grandstanding again. Lucius didn't pay it much heed as he tried to calm his frazzled nerves. He didn't pay much heed until Voldemort gestured in his direction and grinned toothily at him.

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When the examiner had dismissed her on Monday following her potions O.W.L., Hermione had been elated. She had known that not only had she done well, she had excelled. And when she had glanced at Professor Snape before leaving the exam room, catching the tiniest of smiles tugging at the corner of his mouth, she had known how proud he was even if he would never admit to such a thing.

The same could not be said of her Defense Against the Dark Arts exam.

“Thank you, Professor Marchbanks,” she replied hollowly.

Hermione walked from the exam room as calmly as she could, headed for the great hall. She needed something to calm her nerves, badly shaken by the turn the test had taken. Hermione sailed through the counterjinxes and defensive spells portion. Her time spent practicing in the D.A. and sparring in Lucius’ duelling room had served her well. Professor Marchbanks was particularly impressed with her speed and form while Umbridge looked on with a sour expression on her face. The final part of her exam had gone as poorly as the first part had gone well, in her opinion anyway.

She passed by equally dazed fellow students on her way, but paid little attention to them.

The great hall was where Harry and Ron found her later after they had finished their exams for the day, staring into a cup of cooling tea, morosely.

“Bloody hell. You look awful. Don't tell me it went that badly.” Ron sat down across from her, frowning at her dark look.

“Surely you managed to beat McGonagall this time, ‘Mione. Didn't you?” Harry asked, placing a hand gently on her shoulder.

She gave Harry a small, tremulous smile. “No, I banished the boggart, but it- it wasn't Professor McGonagall.”

The look that passed between Harry and Ron did not escape her notice. “Oh. Well do you want to talk about it?”

“No. I appreciate it, but I’d rather not.”
“Well, if you want to...”

“Yes, I know.” Even if she could tell them, Hermione didn't know that she wanted to.

There were so many ways the boggart's choice of disguise could be interpreted, and Hermione could only hope that she had stopped it in time. She hoped that the other people in the room with her took nothing more from it than her fear that she didn't belong in their world. For the last hour, as her tea grew colder, she had replayed the task in her mind obsessively. Professor Marchbanks had seemed to take it that way, but she also wasn't suspicious of Hermione's activities. Umbridge was the rogue factor, and she would have to toe the line for a while so as not to draw her unwanted attention.

While she hoped that Umbridge only saw a fear of belonging, Hermione knew that wasn't what the boggart had latched onto and tried to exploit. She had grown up since the last time she had faced one. Clearly. In two years, though quite possibly in only the last six months, she had grown so much that failure was no longer her overriding fear.

It must have been on her mind from the beginning, tickling at the back of her conscious thought without her really knowing it. Now that she thought about, she had pushed those thoughts away vehemently whenever they had threatened to surface.

As much as she knew about him, Lucius was still a mystery. He was still secretive and she knew he was hiding things from her. She hadn't realized just how much she still feared the possibility that her trust in him was misplaced.

After all they had shared, apparently she still feared his betrayal, one that would lead to the destruction of all she held dear.
To Dance Amongst the Stars

Chapter Notes

Yah! The next chapter is here!!! Got a shot of inspiration. My local theater is showing ALL the Harry Potter films as part of their retro (that part makes me sad to say) series. The upside is that I get to see them all again! Just saw Lucius' introduction this week. PoA is up next.

This one was almost completely changed from its original version. Hopefully I added enough information about Hermione's boggart to satisfy, though I couldn't quite describe it in exacting detail. All words that belong to JK Rowling absolutely do not belong to me. Merely borrowed. I just couldn't make too many changes to a scene that I thought was superbly brought to life by the great Alan Rickman.

And just in case it hasn't been made obvious, I absolutely LOVE the Death Eater costumes from the movies. So much leather!! And those masks!!! Now without further ado...

“A month?” shrieked Umbridge, gawping toadishly at an implacable Professor Snape. “But I wish to interrogate them now! You will provide me with a potion capable of forcing Potter to tell me the truth!”

Hermione watched Professor Snape’s black eyes flick around at each of them briefly, landing on her a split-second longer than the others. “Alas, as I have told you, I cannot. Perhaps, if you wished instead to poison Mr. Potter- and I would have the utmost sympathy if you did- I could provide you with something, but I currently have nothing in my stores that would be suitable for an interrogation.”

Hermione barely managed to keep a neutral expression on her face in response to Professor Snape’s curt words. She knew his storeroom and its contents as well as he did at this point. He was lying to Umbridge. Despite the harsh tone, and his callous words, he was protecting them from her.

“How dare you?” she screeched at him. “To think that Lucius Malfoy has always spoken so highly of you. His high praise is most assuredly ill-deserved, I should think.”

Had she not spent so much time in his presence, Hermione would have missed the flicker of anger that touched his face. It was only the slightest narrowing of the eyes, but it was there nonetheless. If Umbridge had thought to turn him to her cause with her insult, she had grossly misread their taciturn professor. She had just thrown away all hope of that ever happening.

“I can begin right away, but you cannot truly require the use of Veritaserum for a group of troublemakers such as this.” He looked in her direction, the corner of his mouth twitching upward in feigned contempt, to her eyes anyway, before he continued his cursory scan of the room.

“Are you lost again, Lovegood?” he snapped waspishly then dismissed her without giving her a chance to answer as his eyes landed once more on Hermione.
“Miss Lovegood is the only real surprise amongst this lot. One would think Miss Granger, given her academic bent, would be less inclined towards mischief. Sadly that doesn't seem to be the case.”

His gaze shifted again. "And then there are the Weasleys. Need I say more?"

Ron and Ginny both struggled against their captors angrily, but it was a wasted effort. Professor Snape then looked Neville over, but only grimaced at him.

Harry had been staring intently at Professor Snape the entire time as if willing something to him. Hermione had wondered if he was trying to get Professor Snape to see inside his mind, and she recalled the ability Lucius had demonstrated for her, the one Professor Snape had taught him. If Professor Snape was picking up on what Harry was trying to convey she couldn't tell.

Suddenly Harry no longer seemed content with what he was doing and he blurted out a coded message to Professor Snape. It only served to rile Umbridge up even more. Hermione wanted to tell him to shut it, but she dared not give the message more weight in Umbridge's mind. It was clear to her that even though their professor was not going to allow Umbridge to wrangle the truth from them with Veritaserum, he was not going to go out of his way to help them out of their predicament either.

His reaction then, was entirely expected. Total disavowment, a few terse, scathing words to Crabbe, and he was gone. Hermione didn't know if he was going to report what Harry had told him to Dumbledore. She suspected that was the case, but either way, they were going to have to find a way out of their mess themselves.

Hermione clutched her invisible mount tightly, her eyes squeezed shut against the eerie sight of whizzing through the air unaided. She had always hated flying on broomsticks. This was infinitely worse.

Her mind was in turmoil as they winged their way towards the Ministry, replaying the events that had occurred in the forest. Umbridge was a horrible excuse for a human, and Hermione felt that given her behavior she had gotten what she deserved. She was just shocked at her own actions. Keeping Rita Skeeter captive was one thing. Marching Umbridge into the Forbidden Forest with the express intention of leaving her to the tender mercies of the centaurs was another entirely.

Hermione told herself that they had been backed into a corner, and it was all she had been able to think to do at the time. Part of her worried that she had gone too far, and she wondered if she would have been so cruel had she not been emulating Lucius' callous demeanor in order to further their agenda. Part of her saw it as a necessary evil; just one more tough moral dilemma that she could stress about later when they weren't in danger, but what the centaurs had said rang true. She had used them to do her dirty work, and she wasn't sure how she felt about that.

Either way, she couldn't dwell on it now.

Harry was out of his mind with worry, determined to find Sirius, and nothing she had said to him could convince him to move with caution. She thought they were walking into a trap, recalling Lucius’ warning that Harry’s dreams had most likely been anything but. No, she was certain Voldemort was manipulating Harry through the connection, she just couldn’t make him see that, couldn’t make him see that maybe Voldemort was tricking him and Sirius wasn’t in danger at all. Her friends, rushing along in Harry’s wake just like her, were willing to risk their lives to help him. She just hoped none of them would actually be required to pay that price.
Deep within the bowels of the Ministry, having searched room after room, and Harry growing more frantic with each dead end, they finally came upon the place from Harry's dream or not-dream depending on who you asked. Sirius was nowhere to be found and neither, for that matter, was Voldemort. It was just as she had suspected, a knot forming in her stomach as her hand readjusted its grip on her wand.

The giant hall was eerily silent, the darkness like a shroud around them. She suspected that the others were just as unnerved as she was. The glowing, glass sphere was in Harry's hand and a familiar, slightly muffled, drawling voice, was right behind them.

“I'll take that now, Mr. Potter.”

They whirled around and Hermione's heart skipped, thudding double time at the sight before her. He wasn't alone, but she only had eyes for him. She would have known it was him even were it not for the voice and the hair flowing like silk from beneath his hood. Lucius just carried himself like no one else she had ever met.

Harry had described the events in the graveyard mentioning the masks and long black robes in little detail. He had made no mention of dark, tooled leather and elaborately, engraved silver masks. Lucius looked so different than she had expected. The ensemble gave him the look of a warrior rather than a wizard, and it also made her realize just how limited a boggart's power truly was.

Even if she had known in her heart what form the thing that had stepped out of that cupboard had meant to take, she hadn't known what a Death Eater truly looked like. It hadn't known either, and the form it had settled on had more in common with a dementor than the warrior standing before her.

Lucius' head cocked slightly to the side, and Hermione knew that he was looking at her from behind the anonymity that intricate piece of silver afforded. He was more imposing than she had thought he would be. Hermione was reminded of the first time she had ever seen him in Flourish & Blotts looking every bit the Malfoy scion, not that she had known what that meant at the time.

This man standing before her with his face still covered made her feel as he had on that day: small, like she was twelve again and insignificant. Hermione's stomach twisted uncomfortably with unwanted arousal. Her breath stuck in her throat at the realization.

Her unfulfilled request had certainly been misguided, but now as ill-timed desire churned within her she knew for certain that she hadn't made it on a lark. They might all die tonight, and it didn't stop her wanting him. Lucius returned his gaze to Harry, and that seemed to break the spell. She pushed those unwanted feelings aside to focus on the brewing conflict.

Movement next to Lucius finally tore her attention away from him. The madwoman at his side chewing on the tip of her wand made Hermione's skin crawl. She recognized her from the papers: Bellatrix Lestrange. There was a glint of mania in her eyes that reminded Hermione of a rabid dog as she stalked towards them, until Lucius held up a hand in warning to halt her movement. Hermione finally took in the sight of the other Death Eaters loosely flanking Lucius and Bellatrix. They were so woefully outnumbered.

Lucius removed the mask, leaning casually on his cane with an arm outstretched, and somehow this was worse than if he had left it on. His expression was cold, controlled, and indifferent as he looked at Harry. She couldn't see any of the warmth she had come to associate with the man in his penetrating gaze, and her stomach twisted again, this time for a reason wholly different than desire. For the first time in such a long time, a frisson of fear wound its way through her body as she looked at him.
“Come now, Mr. Potter,” Lucius continued in a reasonable, though condescending tone. "Simply hand it over to me and none of your little friends need die."

“Where's Sirius, Malfoy? I know you have him! Where is he?!?” As Harry screamed at Lucius, Hermione’s brain was working overtime. How many Death Eaters could they reasonably take on? There were only six of them; all students against trained killers. She truly hoped Professor Snape had gotten word to the Order. They didn't stand a chance otherwise.

“You should really learn to tell the difference between dreams and reality,” Lucius continued as if Harry hadn't been screaming at him angrily at all.

"Did you truly think that the Dark Lord would be here himself? Stupid boy. Now, hand over the prophecy."

“Harry, he’s not here!” she hissed lowly.

Bellatrix ignored her as if Hermione was so far beneath her that she couldn’t even be bothered to look. The same could not be said for Lucius. His penetrating gaze snapped to her, and she froze, unable to look away.

What she saw in his eyes troubled her, and all traces of her previous arousal vanished. Lucius looked dangerous, and despite his projected calm, he seemed to be barely restrained. It reminded her of the way he had looked surrounded by his destroyed study, and she wondered if he had finally decided that defying his Dark Lord wasn’t worth the effort. The finality in the way he echoed Bellatrix certainly sounded like he had given up.

Whatever the answer, the man standing before them, casually threatening them was a stranger, and she couldn't dwell on the hurt that thought caused. She didn’t have the time. They were in danger now. It didn't matter where Lucius' head was at. There were eleven other Death Eaters who would absolutely kill them that they had to worry about.

Hermione didn't think running was an option at this point. She had her amulet, and she had Lucius’ training. If she could manage to slip out of sight, she had a chance to even the odds, but it wouldn't be easy. They would need a distraction first. The rows of prophecies were long and there was little cover where they were or where they would need to get to.

She wasn't really listening to what Harry was saying. In the back of her mind she knew that whatever it was had infuriated Bellatrix. The woman was a loose cannon, probably more dangerous than all the rest. Lucius himself barely managed to deflect the woman's spell, breaking several prophecies in the scuffle, and then he rounded on her, murder glinting in his eyes.

He was angry, screaming at Bellatrix in a way Hermione had never heard from him, but when he turned back to Harry, his tone was reasonable again. The change in him was an unnerving thing to watch. There was a sudden, sharp pain in her toes as Harry tried to get her attention.

Some of the Death Eaters were laughing, and Harry was saying something to her about the shelves. There was a sudden commotion, startling student and Death Eater alike. Eighteen heads turned as one as the Order burst into the room.

Relief washed through her. Professor Snape had come through for them after all, and her slight delay in the Forbidden Forest had given the Order time to catch up to them. Hermione could have jumped for joy at their arrival, until she recalled that for all intents and purposes Lucius was on the other side. She didn't want him hurt or killed no matter which side he was on.
There was a flurry of movement as the Death Eaters reacted, torn between the students they had been taunting and the newcomers. Hermione only just managed to react when the others did, six curses flying in six different directions. In the confusion, she saw Lucius narrowly deflect a curse hurled at him by Remus Lupin before he spun about and took off in another direction. She felt someone, Harry, grab onto her robes, dragging her along behind him down the long rows of glowing prophecies away from the fight.

Hermione turned away from the locked door to face Harry and…

"Where's everyone else?"

He looked around just as confused, probably expecting to see the others, but it was just Luna.

"Shh, someone's coming," the odd girl whispered.

Hermione strained her ears, and sure enough, she could hear footsteps on the other side of the door. She could just make out the voices through the heavy wood, but save for one couldn't tell who they belonged to.

"Where'd those little brats go?"

"Perhaps you should look for them you imbecile!" She drew back from the door with a start, covering her mouth to muffle her surprise as it rattled loudly on its hinges.

A split-second later, the one who had spoken first wailed, cursing vehemently. "Ow! You bwoke my fucking nose!"

The door rattled again, and the man whimpered pitifully. "If I don't get that fucking prophecy there won't be enough of you left for the Dark Lord to deal with. Do I make myself clear, Rookwood?"

Rookwood, apparently, whimpered again in agreement.

Lucius barked out his orders shortly, sounding quite thorough to her ears as he split up his forces. Hermione was loathe to admit that it seemed less and less likely he was merely playing to the crowd. One bit of information did stick out in her mind though. She thought it might just give them the chance they needed.

It only took a few more minutes for the Death Eaters to disperse and their footsteps to fade down the halls.

Once they were gone, Hermione turned swiftly towards Harry. "Right then, give me the prophecy."

"What? No," Harry said, gripping the little sphere tighter.

"Harry, we don't have time to argue about this."

"It's my prophecy, 'Mione."

"That's my point exactly," she replied, ignoring the detested nickname. "You heard- Mr. Malfoy. They think you have it. They'll be focused on you. Someone else should carry it."

She watched his gaze shift over to Luna who wasn't paying them any mind. He hesitated, but she could see in his eyes that he acknowledged the truth in her words. Reluctantly he slipped it into her outstretched hand.
"And if they find out you have it?"

She scoffed at the question. "They won't. They expect you to play the hero. It's how they got you here."

He nodded morosely. "I assume you have a plan then."

Hermione tucked the glass ball into her robes. "Try to get out with it while the Order fights them off. If that's not an option then find a place to hide until it's over."

She didn't mention that it would be far easier for her rather than him to do either because of her amulet. They didn't have time for her to explain what it did, and she doubted he would trust her with the prophecy once he knew the source of her amulet. It didn't matter how she had gotten it. What mattered was that it worked.

Harry went first as they moved farther along while Luna offered to take the rear position. It made sense, of course, to keep the prophecy protected on either side, but it wouldn't allow her to activate the amulet immediately. She would be forced to wait for the right moment.

They had nearly reached the room's far exit without incident, but suddenly heard a loud thud and a crash behind them. Hermione, Harry, and Luna broke out into a run, charging ahead away from the noise. A similar noise came from ahead of them. Trapped between the two, all three of them dove through the closest door.

They hit the floor hard landing in a heap of limbs. Hermione twisted around and pointed her wand at the door they had just come through.

"Colloportus," Hermione cast quickly, and the door sealed itself shut. One problem solved for now.

When she craned her head around to find out which room they had ended up in she couldn't tell initially. It took a moment for her eyes to adjust to the dark, but once they did she saw MacNair in the act of training his wand on them, and bathed in Jupiter's glow, stood Lucius Malfoy, shock still etched on his features at their unexpected entrance.

Hermione, Luna, and Harry flung themselves apart a second before MacNair's curse landed where they had been only moments before. She came to her feet, landing in a ready stance, her wand trained on the wizard in front of her. The look of shock on his face was gone, replaced with a look of determination as he stared Harry down.

Luna and Harry faced off against MacNair, already engaged in their fight. He was doing a good job of holding them off. Neither would be able to face him alone. That left her free to engage Lucius.

He took a step towards Harry, stopping short as Hermione stepped into his path. His gaze darted past her before he met hers again.

"Don't try and stop me. Stand aside."

Hermione raised her wand defensively. "You know I won't."

The battle raged behind her, but she couldn't spare a glance over her shoulder. Lucius' face was illuminated by the glow from the miniature sun: half in light and half in shadow. His eyes blazed like twin stars in the darkness, and when he set his shoulders in a way she knew well, slipping unconsciously into a ready stance, Hermione realized with dismay which side he was standing on.
"Nothing, not even you, is going to keep that prophecy from me. You're not special."

Hermione couldn't stop herself flinching slightly at his last sentence. Her thoughts flashed back to a Death Eater in billowing robes and a bone-white mask stepping from a cupboard, all the people she knew and loved dead at his feet, the same words issuing forth in a mocking tone as he stalked towards her.

_It's all your fault, you know. Every single one. All because a filthy, little mudblood thought she was special. You're just a mudblood, nothing special._

Had Lucius changed so much in such a short time or had she been a fool? Unlike the boggart there was no mockery in his voice, but it was just as hurtful in its own way for what it meant.

Lucius would go through her to get his hands on the prophecy. What would he do, she wondered, if he realized that she had it? She resolved not to find out.

He stepped to the side again, and once more she stood in his path, tightening her grip on her wand.

"Please don't do this, Lucius. Don't make me do this," she hissed angrily, a tear slipping down her cheek.

His voice, when he responded, was pitched so low that only she could hear it over the sound of battle raging behind her. "You act like I have a choice."

Her eyes widened in surprise at the statement, and the next moment his wand slashed in a downward arc towards her. She deflected whatever he had cast easily, unsure whether adrenaline was affecting her reflexes or he was holding back. If he truly wanted the prophecy as badly as he seemed, she couldn't imagine why he would do such a thing.

She dodged a second flung curse, a stunner this time, and returned one of her own, and then the battle began in earnest. Their back and forth was a vicious dance just like their duels in his training room; exactly like their duels in his training room. The longer it went on, the more certain Hermione became that he was only trying to stop her rather than hurt or kill her. Everything he threw her way was definitely non-lethal.

They were both breathing hard, both slowing as they tired from their drawn out battle. From the corner of her eye MacNair finally went down from one of Luna's well-placed curses.

Her and Harry were just turning their attention towards them when everything went wrong all at once. One of the doors to the room flew open, the Death Eaters Mulciber and Dolohov forcing the auror Kingsley Shacklebolt backwards through it. Dolohov shouted a curse Hermione had never heard before. Shacklebolt dove out of the way, and Hermione watched in horror as a purple arc of flame came streaking towards her. She heard a scream, felt the glass orb shatter in her pocket, just before everything went black.

Chapter End Notes

It was brought to my attention that I might be evil... I mean I was sorted into Gryffindor, so I really don't think that's possible. Do you? ;D
The Chameleon's Gift

Chapter Notes

It's been a hot minute, so here's a super long chapter for you. Hope you all enjoy!!
Comments and kudos are welcome!

She wasn't dead.

The realization actually came as quite a surprise.

With Dolohov's unknown spell barreling towards her, and her unable to get out of the way, Hermione had been certain she was done for. As her eyes slowly fluttered open, and the pain made itself known, she felt like she probably should have been.

"Hey, she's waking up! Madam Pomfrey!" Ron yelled loudly.

Hermione grimaced at all the shouting as her friends crowded round her, excited that she was awake and well. Mostly. Her chest was on fire, and she could feel the bandages wrapped tightly around her, but when she glanced down couldn't see past the hospital dressing gown she wore. It was a bit antiquated, but she was glad it at least preserved more modesty than those favored in muggle hospitals.

Luna beamed at her, and said in her dreamy voice, "The way you took on Mr. Malfoy was really something, Hermione. Daddy always said he was a brilliant duellist, but you really held your own."

"Yeah," Ginny added, "Harry and Luna told us all about it. I didn't realize you'd gotten that good. All those D.A. meetings really paid off, didn't they? You probably would have had him too if not for that bastard Dolohov."

She could only smile weakly at her friends while her heart broke inside her damaged chest. Lucius was both a sore and confusing subject at the moment. If they knew the truth about how she had been able to hold her own...

"That's enough now! Move back all of you." Madam Pomfrey shooed them out of her way, helping her lift a glass to her parched lips. The cool water soothed her throat, though it was quickly followed up with several foul-tasting potions, one of which turned out to be a sleeping draught.

Hermione fell back asleep quickly without having had the chance to ask about her injuries or what else had happened at the ministry that night.

It was dark when she woke, moonlight shining in through the windows. Her chest still hurt terribly, far too much to attempt sitting up in bed. Hopefully the potions Madam Pomfrey had prescribed for her were within easy reach. She glanced over, and was surprised to find Professor Dumbledore sitting next to the bed, pouring over an old book, his half-moon glasses perched low on his nose.

"Ah, Miss Granger," he said kindly, looking up from his reading. "Poppy informed me that you might be waking soon. How are you feeling?"
"Sore," she croaked out.

"Yes, I would imagine so." He marked his place, setting his book aside on the nearby nightstand, and picked up a small vial, holding it up to the light to peer at it.

After a moment Dumbledore held it out to her.

"This one, I believe, should help. Poppy has several others here for you. She was adamant you should take them, but I thought you might wish to talk first."

Hermione swallowed down the pain potion, feeling the tightness and the burning sensation abate almost immediately, though it didn't go away entirely. She sighed in relief and nodded in response to Dumbledore. Her friends had told her all about their adventures in the Department of Mysteries the second time she had woken; from Neville's broken arm and shattered wand to Ron's encounter with the strange brain creature.

Once Harry had left the infirmary they had even told her about Sirius in hushed tones as though afraid to say it too loudly. His earlier, reserved behavior made more sense in light of this new information. It saddened her that Harry was hurting so much and there was little she could do about it.

Losing someone he had so obviously cared about when he had so little family would be difficult for him. He was sure to be blaming himself. After all, the prophecy had not been the reason they had gone to the Ministry in the first place.

It was gone now too, its secrets lost in the bright flash of green light and loud roar from Dolohov's curse.

Hermione could have sworn, though, that Dolohov's spell had been purple instead and fiery rather than that blinding flash. She still didn't know exactly what had happened to her. Harry and Luna's accounts of the event had been muddled and contradictory, their focus on their own opponent.

She didn't know what had become of Lucius either. Her friends hadn't deemed whatever had happened to him important enough to make it into their hurried tale before Madam Pomfrey had quickly shooed them off again so that she could rest.

"You remember being struck, I take it?" Dumbledore questioned.

Hermione nodded. It was the last thing she remembered before waking up in the infirmary even if she was a little confused on the specifics.

"Truly you are incredibly lucky, Miss Granger. The curse was one of Antonin Dolohov's own devising. Severus tells me that you're the first he knows of to survive being struck by it."

Oh yes, Dolohov.

Naturally Professor Dumbledore would want to talk about the man who had almost killed her. She was curious even if it wasn't the news she was really looking for.

"But Professor," Hermione asked weakly, "if it's so dangerous how did I survive it?" She still hadn't had the chance to see her unbandaged chest.

"How indeed," he murmured enigmatically. "I suppose it would be more accurate to say that you survived Dolohov's attempt to curse you."
Hermione furrowed her brow in confusion at his odd wording.

"According to Madam Pomfrey, you had a necklace, Miss Granger. Were you aware that it was quite magical?"

She paled, swallowing hard before answering. Of course she had known. "Yes. I mean… I suspected. It was a gift..."

Dumbledore nodded solemnly. "A rather wondrous gift as it turns out. You see, Dolohov's curse never actually reached you. It struck your necklace instead."

Hermione gingerly placed her hand to her chest, only now realizing the familiar weight of her amulet was no longer there. Dumbledore produced from one of his many pockets, the chain that had so recently hung about her neck. The fixture where her emerald had once resided was little more than a twisted, scorched hunk of metal.

"I am afraid it was completely destroyed," he said, handing it to her.

"According to Mr. Potter and Miss Lovegood, there was an explosion, a magical backlash of a sort. It was this explosion of energy that caused- an emerald, was it?"

She nodded once more, and he continued with a nod of his own. "It was this resulting explosion that caused your emerald to shatter. Many of the shards became lodged in your chest. Madam Pomfrey had quite the time removing them I can assure you, and I recommend strictly adhering to her potion regimen to help with the healing."

Well that certainly explained the discrepancy. She hadn't misremembered Dolohov's attack at all. "Did she get them all out, Professor?"

"Oh, yes. Sadly, as the stone was so utterly destroyed, and we cannot tell what its magical properties were, we have no way of knowing what, if any, side effects there might be."

Here he patted her hand rather kindly in a grandfatherly way, as if to reassure her that she needn't worry.

"Follow Poppy's advice, and I'm sure you'll be right as rain in no time at all. Certainly, the sentimental value attached to such a gift can never be replaced, but as it did save your life, I'm quite certain the person who gave it to you could wish for no better outcome."

Hermione had no idea if that statement was true or not. Her encounter with Lucius in the Department of Mysteries had left her with more questions than answers.

She coughed slightly, and Professor Dumbledore handed her a glass of water which she gulped down gratefully. "After I was knocked out, did he- Dolohov that is, did he escape?"

"I fear he did unfortunately, along with Bellatrix LeStrange, and Lord Voldemort himself who arrived in the end," and then Dumbledore proceeded to list for her all the Death Eaters they had managed to capture in the midst of all the chaos. Most, it seemed, had tried to run before the end to no avail.

At last, he came to the one name that actually interested her. She tried not to look obviously interested. "And Lucius Malfoy was rather grievously injured by Alastor Moody following your duel with him, which I am told was quite impressive by the way."

Hermione smiled wanly at the compliment. Truth be told, she was growing tired of all the praise,
especially since she knew that Lucius had not been fighting with the intent of killing her.

"Well, I think I have kept you quite long enough. Now, you should take the rest of these," and he indicated the remaining potions on the nightstand, "or Madam Pomfrey will certainly be cross with me."

"I will, but if it's all right, Professor, I'd like to stay up just a little longer."

Dumbledore smiled warmly. "Of course. I see nothing wrong with that, provided it is not too much longer, and you do not overtax yourself."

"I won't," she assured him.

"Then I shall simply wish you a good night, Miss Granger, and a speedy recovery."

She thanked him for his kind words, and watched as the headmaster closed the infirmary door quietly behind him.

She lay in bed thinking about everything Dumbledore had told her, replaying the events of the Ministry over in her head. After the Department of Mysteries it was hard to reconcile the Lucius Malfoy she had come to know, the mentor who had taught her so much, with the man leading Voldemort's Death Eaters.

Hermione didn't want to think about Lucius, but it was impossible not to. She could see so clearly the look of cold indifference in his eyes as he had threatened them all. It hadn't been imagined. She wondered how he could be the same man who had shared so much with her. Lucius hadn't just been physically intimate, he'd been deeply personal. She hadn't imagined that either.

She was angry and hurt, but above all she was conflicted. Hermione didn't want to believe everything they had shared had all been a lie. He had shown her such vulnerability. How could it have been?

She couldn't help but replay in her mind those scant, surprising words he had uttered just before their duel began.

*You act like I have a choice.*

Had Voldemort coerced him? Or threatened him somehow? Or was she simply latching on to another lie with desperate hope? He was the one who had told her to get comfortable with being ruthless after all.

She pushed thoughts of their duel aside for the moment to examine the rest of his behavior more closely. Lucius had clearly been entirely focused on the prophecy, and until she had stepped into his path everyone but Harry had been little more than an afterthought for him. Actually, now that she thought about it, aside from her he hadn't even looked at anyone else from their side. They hadn't even registered.

The same could not be said of his own companions. Given his interactions with Bellatrix LeStrange, Lucius clearly hated her. The one time he had mentioned her before he hadn't bothered to hide his disdain, but what she had witnessed at the Ministry went so far beyond that. Whatever bad blood existed between them, it obviously went deeper than he had previously let on.

And then there was Rookwood with his broken nose, and whatever else Lucius had done to him before barking out his orders to his subordinates. There had been no love between *them* either. Armed with this knowledge, she finally decided to examine their duel, concluding once again that,
yes, Lucius had been solely focused on the prophecy.

And yet…

As focused as he had been, he had refused to use anything stronger than an *Impedimentia* in his attempt to get past her. It didn't make any sense. He should have used his superior skill to take her down quickly if he was so intent on getting it. Lessons or not, she still wasn't a match for him.

In the Hall of Prophecies she had been torn between needing to help her friends and wanting Lucius to be safe. And again in the room filled with planets she'd missed a couple of opportunities, moments when Lucius had left himself open because she hadn't wanted to hurt him. Had he been torn as well; between what he was supposed to do and what he wanted? Or was she just a fool?

It was growing quite late as she pondered these questions, long after Professor Dumbledore had left her to get some sleep that she heard a sound. Hermione climbed out of bed feeling the weight of her injuries, and with great effort, padded silently and slowly over to the window. A familiar, regal-looking owl greeted her by pecking on the window several more times, its presence complicating things further.

Her hands trembling with the effort, Hermione opened the window to let it in, and it swooped around the room twice before landing on the bed nearest her. When it dropped the cream colored envelope onto the bed, it looked at her pointedly, and then flew back through the open window into the night.

Hermione stared down at it, heart thudding and making her chest ache even more. Her name was written on the front in Lucius’ elegant, flowing script. With leaden movements, she closed the window.

She didn't touch it for a long time, afraid of what it might say. Would the contents reveal what an utter fool she had been or would she find out exactly what he had been doing in the Ministry? Her hands trembled this time from fear as she picked up the heavy envelope.

She turned it over in her hands as she walked back towards her bed.

Hermione didn't know what to do now, and she ended up doing something wildly uncharacteristic given her inquisitive nature. She stuffed the unopened letter deep under her pillow, tossed back the remainder of her potions, and climbed back into bed. Sleep overtook her quickly. Mercifully.

*I'll deal with it later*, she thought just before drifting off, because she absolutely didn't feel up to dealing with it now.

Hermione left the infirmary the next day, much to Madam Pomfrey’s dismay and against her advisement. She'd fussed over her in her customary way, of course, but the wounds caused by her shattered emerald would no doubt be much easier to heal than whatever dark curse Dolohov had tried to use on her would have been. That was supposing she had lived through it, of course.

As it was, she was still going to be taking several different healing potions over the course of about a week. She took it easy though, grateful that it was Saturday and they were finished with O.W.L.s already. If she had needed to concentrate on them too…

Instead, she was able to relax in the Gryffindor common room with her friends. Harry was understandably still upset, and excused himself early from the group. Hermione knew she wasn't the only one hurting and couldn't imagine how Harry must feel. He had had so little time with his
godfather and now he was gone.

She wanted to talk to him about Sirius' death, but the others thought it was a bad idea. He needed to talk about it in order to move on. Burying the pain wouldn't help, though she supposed she couldn't be throwing any stones. Her slightly crumpled letter was sitting in the drawer of her nightstand, still unopened. She had been trying to forget it was there and hadn't really been succeeding.

At least Lucius was alive much to her friends’ dismay, mostly Harry and Ron, Ron being the most vocal. If Draco had still been attending Hogwarts, she was certain Ron would have picked a fight with him. He was still crowing about how Lucius was finally getting what he deserved, how he was going to spend the rest of his life in Azkaban.

She doubted Lucius would receive a life sentence. He had a team of excellent solicitors on retainer as well as the means to bribe enough Ministry officials to avoid such a harsh sentence. It really only helped his case that he had used only non-lethal spells against her whatever the reason for doing so.

No, there was little chance of Lucius spending life in Azkaban. She didn't know how much time he would be sentenced with, but was sure it would be far less than Harry and Ron thought it would be.

Whatever else had occurred, Lucius' gift had ultimately saved her life. She was grateful, but it didn't make his apparent betrayal any easier to stomach, and with the school term winding down, she found herself with little else to focus on. Hermione had decided that a final lesson with Professor Snape would be a great way to clear her head. Focusing on the lesson would help her keep her mind off Lucius Malfoy and the letter in her room.

So when she entered Professor Snape’s office early Saturday evening before dinner, it was with every intention of doing just that. He was marking papers as he always seemed to be doing, a no-longer shocking amount of red covering the one she could see him working on. He glanced up at her arrival but did not pause in his work.

"I do hope you realize that your lesson was yesterday, Miss Granger."

"I'm terribly sorry, Professor," she replied with a small smile, rubbing absently at her bandaged chest, "but I'm afraid I was indisposed yesterday,"

"You are fortunate that you were merely indisposed." He crossed out an entire section with an angry flourish.

She couldn't tell if it was her getting hurt or the essay that was fouling his mood, because he wrote 'unsubstantiated supposition' on the parchment and she knew how much he hated that. It was probably the essay.

It was while he finished this correction, only halfway down the page, that her eyes wandered across his desk, and she caught sight of a folded copy of the Daily Prophet. Lucius stared back at her from the front page on his knees, forced to hold his number placard in front of him despite his injuries. He was as stoic and dignified as could be in prison stripes, but where others might see that wall of icy, Malfoy defiance directed at the camera, Hermione could see the pain it masked, and it had nothing to do with the neck brace or his bandaged arm or any of the injuries she couldn't see.

She pulled the paper toward herself unconsciously, opening and smoothing it out on the desk, staring at it all the while. The pain in his eyes that mesmerized her wasn't physical. She had seen the shadow of that kind of pain before: when he spoke about protecting Draco and when he spoke about his scar. How could he have been lying to her these past six months? It wasn't possible. No
one, not even Lucius, was that good of a liar.

“Miss Granger?” She looked up to find Professor Snape unexpectedly looking at her, a slight frown on his brow. His quill hovering over the essay, forgotten.

“I'm sorry, Professor.” Her voice was shaky with suppressed emotion.

“No, I should apologize. I forgot that I left it out. A poor excuse, certainly, given what you went through.”

He tried to take it back from her, presumably to hide it from sight, but her fingers tightened on the paper in her hands and Professor Snape released his hold.

A dangerous thought solidified in her mind, bolstered by thoughts of the letter in her nightstand. If anyone could help her sort through the contraction that was Lucius Malfoy it had to be Professor Snape.

“Mr. Malfoy…,” she began haltingly. "You were- are his friend. I saw you together around the school at Quidditch matches and such.”

“Yes,” he stated cautiously, apparently not quite sure where she was going with her statement or if she was looking to lay blame somewhere.

She dragged her gaze away from the mugshot in her hands with great effort. Hermione finally looked up at Professor Snape, a somewhat lost look on her face as she tried to collect her thoughts.

The apprehension evident on his face finally snapped her out of her stupor. “I'm sorry, Professor. Do you mind terribly if we put the kettle on today? I'm afraid I'm far too distracted for a lesson.”

His black eyes flicked down to where she still gripped the *Prophet* tightly.

“Something tells me we won't be discussing theory either,” Professor Snape answered with a grimace of distaste.

He nevertheless called for tea from the kitchens and began carefully setting aside his work as they waited for it to arrive.

Professor Snape handed her a cup and saucer, her tea prepared to perfection, with an arched eyebrow. The look plainly said that he expected her to begin when she was ready. He wouldn't prod, certainly not after what had happened before, but he fully expected to hear something from her and soon.

Hermione still found herself hesitant to speak about what was truly on her mind. So naturally, she started on safer ground as she gathered her thoughts and prepared to work herself up to it.

“Thank you for lying to Umbridge about the veritaserum and about Harry’s message.”

“I wondered if you'd catch that.” There was a pleased edge to his tone. It made her wonder how often anyone apart from Dumbledore thanked him for anything. Given his surly disposition, probably never. She made a mental note to rectify that in the future if provided the opportunity.

“You alerted the Order. That's why they were able to arrive so quickly.”

“You'll notice they didn't arrive quickly enough,” he replied, neither confirming nor denying her statement. “Mere students should never have been placed in the position necessary to fight off
Death Eaters twice their number, no matter the capability of the student in question. You should have known better, Miss Granger.”

It was probably the highest praise he would give her. He still hadn't mentioned her performance on her Potions O.W.L. and he didn't seem inclined to either. She had grown used to his teaching style now though; offering little praise and allowing the work to speak for itself instead. It was why her constant need for validation had always irritated him so much in the past.

“I couldn't convince Harry it was a trap, but I couldn't just leave him either.” From her perspective it hadn't even been a choice.

“Yes, Mr. Potter does behave as if the rules do not apply to him, and unfortunately those around him often suffer because of this,” he replied with a sneer.

She wisely didn't try to correct him. Just like Harry, she would never convince Professor Snape that he was being irrational when the true source of their animosity lay in the distant past.

Shaking himself from his inner thoughts, his gaze landed on her. “According to Madam Pomfrey, you were incredibly fortunate. How goes your recovery?”

Hermione knew by now that if he was asking he expected an actual report rather than trite platitudes about how much better she was feeling.

"It's… a process. It feels almost like there's a knot trapped inside my chest. Residual magic from the explosion, I think."

"Most likely," he agreed, "though it should dissipate in time."

"Sometimes it's hard to breathe."

"Pain?"

"Some, but it's manageable. Madam Pomfrey has me on an entire regimen."

Professor Snape nodded as though he was perfectly aware of which potions she had been prescribed. He stared pensively down at his desktop, a faraway look in his eyes as he considered her injury.

"No matter how well it heals, you'll likely always carry the scar."

"I assumed as much."

"Try an infusion of flobberworm mucus, wiggentree bark, and two- no three drops of salamander blood. Steep it in something over a medium blue flame. I suggest using pomegranate juice. You should find the result more palatable."

Hermione nodded, though she couldn’t help but grimace in distaste at the thought of drinking the concoction. “I'll visit Diagon Alley as soon-"

"Nonsense," he interrupted sternly. "You'll take what you need from the storeroom. You may replenish it when you return for the new term."

She smiled at her professor’s gruff demeanor as they drank their tea. Hermione could tell that he was waiting for her to continue and she grew apprehensive once again.

He set down his cup and saucer, his rumbling baritone interrupting her thoughts. “You were asking
about Lucius Malfoy?” Clearly he had grown tired of her dancing around the subject.

She took a nervous sip and nodded quickly.

"Apparently you managed to hold your own in a duel with him," there was an undeniable note of suspicion in his voice, "a feat that I find fascinating as Lucius Malfoy is an expert duellist. Any thoughts on that, Miss Granger?"

"Well, I don't think he was really focused on me. He wanted the prophecy. If we hadn't been interrupted, I think it would have been over soon anyway."

"Interrupted?" he questioned, an eyebrow lifting slightly at her choice of words. "By Dolohov you mean? Do you know what the spell he used on you was, Miss Granger?"

Hermione shook her head in reply. "He created it. That's all I know."

“Yes, that is correct. What it actually does is boil a person's blood, essentially cooking them from the inside.” He took a sip.

“Dolohov found it humorous. You're the first to have lived through it. My point,” he continued, indicating the paper nearest her side of the desk with a nod of his head, “is that Dolohov nearly killed you, but it's Malfoy you're interested in talking about.”

“Well, I understand Dolohov, Professor. There's no great mystery there.”

Professor Snape tilted his head in curiosity. “And what don't you understand about Lucius Malfoy?”

“Well, I suppose I don't understand why.” He gave her a puzzled look, so she continued. “As you said, Dolohov nearly killed me. Yes, he's cruel but he’s really just a brute. He's a follower. A fanatic. I get that. I've crossed paths with Mr. Malfoy several times over the years. He's not like Dolohov. In the ministry he was giving orders; leading the others. He's extremely intelligent.”

“He is,” Professor Snape confirmed, not that Hermione needed the confirmation. She was fully aware of Lucius' intellectual capabilities.

“And he's rich and well-respected,” she continued. "He could have just sat back and worked in the shadows, and no one would have ever known that he was involved in any way. I guess I just don't understand why someone like Mr. Malfoy would willingly follow Voldemort in such a way. Is the man you know so different from what I've seen?"

Professor Snape stirred his tea as he considered the question. She wondered what he was thinking.

“No,” he finally said at length. “Your assessment is correct. Lucius has always been as you've described him: a natural leader, charismatic, persuasive, intelligent. These traits are what has always made him such a valuable asset, but the Department of Mysteries was a fiasco. Even Lucius would not have escaped a failure of such magnitude unscathed.”

He glanced back at the paper on the desk between them, a shadow passing across his face. “He's lucky to be where he is now.”

“But even if they share a belief, why would he follow someone like that? Why would he follow someone who would turn on him so quickly?” She glanced quickly in Professor Snape's direction. "Forgive me for saying, but you don't follow him."
"Don't I?" he questioned archly. "There are many who would say otherwise, from your own house in fact."

There was no mistaking his veiled allusion to Harry who didn't bother keeping his suspicions a secret.

“If you were a Death Eater, why would we be having these lessons?”

“Perhaps I am merely so desperate for intelligent conversation that almost anyone would do,” and there was unmistakable amusement in his tone.

Professor Snape studied Hermione with intense scrutiny, one eyebrow arched as though he were coming to a decision, and then he did something shockingly unexpected. He set down his cup and saucer, and then drew back his sleeve to expose his left forearm. There, on his pale flesh, was the same dark brand she had become intimately familiar with from her time spent with Lucius.

"You've never seen it. Have you?"

Hermione only shook her head. Not on him.

"But surely you were told about it? You don't seem surprised."

She nodded. Harry and Ron had both told her about seeing Professor Snape's mark following the Triwizard Tournament.

"Do you know what it is? What it does?"

"Well it-" she began, and then stopped suddenly. Lucius had never been interested in discussing his mark. "It's connected to Voldemort somehow. I don't exactly know how, but I have some theories."

Professor Snape pulled his sleeve back into place. "I'm certain your theories are rather shockingly close to the mark."

Hermione almost snorted. Had he just made a joke?

“The Dark Mark is a type of Protean charm modified by the Dark Lord." She felt her chest swell with pride, validated by his confirmation of her suspicions regarding the brand, but then quickly settled down to listen.

"All who bear the mark are bound by it," he continued. "Lucius... did not choose to take the mark, it was expected of him, but once on the path there is little choice but to follow it."

You act like I have a choice, he had said to her.

"Although Lucius' pride would never allow him to consider himself a slave...” He ended with a slight shrug of his shoulders.

Lucius might not consider himself one, but Hermione knew that the word was not far from his thoughts. It was why he had transferred Draco rather than allow Voldemort to get his hands on him.

“But you switched sides, Professor. I mean, Professor Dumbledore trusts you, and he wouldn't without good reason. It is possible then to rebel against it, against him.”

He gave her a stern look. “I do not tell you these things so that you may gossip with your friends or
get it in your head to go around saving people, Miss Granger. Lucius Malfoy is not to be trifled with. He is who he needs to be in any given moment; a chameleon the likes of which I've never seen before."

Professor Snape's features softened somewhat, taking on an unexpected melancholy air, as if he were momentarily lost in memory.

"Lucius is bound to the Dark Lord. As am I. As all Death Eaters are bound to him. There are reasons the Dark Lord has not turned on me as well. Hogwarts is, among other things, a safe haven."

And there it was again. Professor Snape all but telling her that he was, in fact, still a Death Eater in one sentence, and then turning around in the next to imply the opposite. His loyalties were uncertain, just as Lucius had said, but what he offered Voldemort was invaluable. In the event he was loyal, his proximity to Professor Dumbledore was too great an asset to overlook.

That was why Professor Snape was still alive. He was too valuable to kill on suspicion alone. She looked down at Lucius' picture on the paper's front page again. Lucius was not so lucky. Voldemort would never allow a second unknown. One was too much for someone like him.

“So, Mr. Malfoy is only alive because he's in Azkaban?"

Her professor nodded. “Yes. The Dark Lord was already displeased with him. This failure would have sealed his fate, but even the Dark Lord's power cannot breach the walls of Azkaban.”

As she finished her tea, Hermione's thoughts drifted to her hidden letter. Professor Snape had proven less than helpful in sorting out her feelings on the matter even if he had given her new information to consider. He clearly didn't trust Lucius, but as much as Dumbledore trusted him, he wasn't entirely beyond suspicion himself, because Lucius didn't trust him either. She hated this part: not knowing who to trust.

There was no way around it.

She would have to read the letter, and decide for herself where to place her trust. A part of her trusted what they had shared, but fear wasn't rational and a nearly equal part of her feared what that letter contained.

Hermione sequestered herself in the Room of Requirement after dinner. She had focused on a private, comforting, quiet place, and the room had not disappointed. She stepped inside what appeared to be Lucius’ library, a roaring fire crackling in the hearth, with a sick feeling in the pit of her stomach.

She sat down in the leather chair, a perfect replica of the one she had sat in countless times before, and pulled the slightly crumpled letter from her pocket with trembling hands. A shaky breath and the wax seal was broken. It was with shuddering anticipation that Hermione unfolded it and began to read.

It's been two hours now, and still I find it difficult to begin. Regardless, I'm out of time and I must. Somehow.

The Dark Lord has set a task for me, one that I mentioned briefly some months ago, one which I can no longer postpone. He believes the prophecy will help him win this war. I know the horror he plans to inflict should that happen.
And that, I cannot allow.

As this letter has found its way into your hands, I can only speculate that I have failed the mission tasked to me as planned. I can only hope that I managed to succeed at my own before the end.

Hermione’s blood ran cold, her hand flying to cover her mouth. Lucius had been planning to destroy the prophecy. That was why he had been so focused on it, why he had wanted it so badly. There was no other explanation, no reason for him to write to her.

He hadn't expected to survive the Department of Mysteries regardless of the battle's outcome. At the least, he had anticipated the possibility. Failing Voldemort wasn't an option. Professor Snape knew it. That meant Lucius knew it too.

Hermione continued reading, her heart pounding in her chest having realized the letter in her hands was meant as a farewell. She could almost hear the evident affection in his next words.

My great regret is that the mission now rests upon your shoulders alone. I have no doubt that you are entirely capable of shouldering the responsibility, even if I may desperately wish it were not necessary. You are no longer a pawn, if you were ever truly one to begin with.

Here the sentence ended with a smear as though he had been interrupted, and the letter continued as though he were truly out of time.

The Ministry will raid the manor. My safe is unplottable and well-hidden. They will not find it. The contents therein now belong to you. Use them to finish what I could not.

Yours,

Lucius

Hermione read it over again and found herself staring into the fire in the end, an empty feeling inside. He hadn't known she would be there. Students weren't allowed off school grounds unless they were going to Hogsmeade. Of course, he wouldn't have known. He must have been just as shocked to see her, and if he were openly betraying his master, his contempt towards her would have been for her protection.

Professor Snape hadn't said it outright, but she didn't exactly need a map drawn out for her. There were two ways out of Voldemort's service once someone had been marked.

Either Voldemort killed you for one of a dozen petty reasons, or even for no reason at all, or you gave him reason and risked the uncertainty of betrayal, aware that death was the most likely outcome. Lucius, wanting to strike off his chains, had known this. That was the answer to the question she had asked him so long ago in a room that looked exactly like the one she sat in now; the question of why Lucius would go against him to begin with.

Lucius had wanted freedom for himself and his family, and had gambled heavily hoping for that outcome. He had gambled, but he hadn't completely lost.

It wasn't over yet, he wasn't dead, and she wasn't giving up. As soon as the school term was over and the Ministry was finished, she would portkey into Malfoy manor and see what he had left for her. Then she could formulate a plan and perhaps spend her summer hunting the rest of the horcruxes.

There was nothing she could do about Lucius. She didn't dare visit him. It would draw too much attention for her of all people to visit a known Death Eater. For now he was as safe as he could be.
Hopefully he stayed that way.

-----------------------------------------------------------------------------

Lucius still couldn't believe that he was alive.

By all accounts, he shouldn't be.

He hadn't planned to be, but he was alive and Hermione…

He shivered, the frigid stone against his back seeping like ice through his threadbare prison clothes. The healer had left an hour earlier, his ribs and the bones in his right arm fully mended so that he could be shackled to the wall by both wrists rather than just the one. It would take at least one more visit from the healer, though more likely two, to mend the bones in his neck and jaw.

His solicitor had left an hour before the healer arrived bringing with her precious little news aside from the knowledge that he would not be avoiding Azkaban this time. Had he been told otherwise he wouldn't have believed it anyway. It didn't matter how good his solicitors were, and they were all exceptional, he wasn't escaping this time by claiming to be imperiused. Lucius was so certain of this that he had told them to focus on getting a reduced sentence rather than exoneration, and to cash in a couple of favors if needed.

The scrape of a key in the lock roused him from his miserable rest, and he cracked open his eyes as the heavy door to his tiny cell creaked on its hinges.

Otherwise he didn't move.

Dim moonlight filtered in through the narrow window slit, the guard illuminated enough for him to see that this one was new. Lucius took a sudden interest as the man thudded on heavy footsteps towards him.

"Will you tell me what happened?" he asked, reining in the quiet desperation in his voice as the guard drew near. "Who was killed? Did-

The guard didn't say a word to him. He reared back his booted foot and connected with Lucius' side with a sickening crunch.

Lucius cried out and slid down the wall, gasping as the intense pain whited out his vision. He curled in on himself and cradled his freshly broken ribs, whimpering as he eyed the guard warily.

The man in question set down the bowl he had been carrying so hard some of the thin, brown stew inside sloshed over the rim onto the floor. He crouched down over Lucius, pulling his arms away from where they clutched at his sides. His chains clanked noisily, and the guard grunted to himself in satisfaction as he methodically checked the shackles at each wrist and found them secure.

Lucius lay curled in the fetal position on the frozen stone long after the door had closed and the key turned in the lock, the guard's booted footsteps disappearing down the hall. At last he attempted to sit up, his progress hampered by the stiff brace around his neck and his newest injury. A black wave of nausea overtook him as he felt his ribs grind together. He sat still for a long time, staring blankly at the wall before him.

He should have known better than to ask, but he was so desperate for information. No one would tell him a thing. His solicitor had been forbidden, the Wizengamot's ruling, she had revealed: no information beyond what was necessary for his defense, and they had ruled all details beyond those he was already privy to a risk.
He glanced up at the tiny patch of stormy sky beyond the narrow window slit. Without him there to stop it, his letter would have gone out by now. He didn't know if she would still be there to accept it. Her scream as she had been struck haunted him. He knew what Dolohov's spell did, and though he hadn't allowed himself to shed a tear, he couldn't manage to dispel the empty feeling inside. Lucius swallowed down a lump in his throat. She couldn't possibly still be alive. He was fooling himself to believe so, but as far as he knew, Dolohov was still breathing.

For now.

Lucius pulled the bowl closer, his movements stiff and wooden. The stew was cold, he'd been sitting a long time, but he also hadn't seen any steam rising from the surface when the guard had brought it in either. He lifted the bowl to his lips, gagging at the taste, but forced himself to drink it. He might not have planned to be alive or in Azkaban, but he was, and he had to formulate a new plan. Quickly.

It might have been forbidden, but there was always a way to get what he needed. He just needed the right plan to get the information he sought. Voldemort and his horcruxes didn't matter to him much at the moment. He had a much more pressing concern.

His solicitors would secure an early release, of that he was certain, but if Dolohov had managed to get captured as well, all the better. He wouldn't have to wait five or ten or fifteen years. He would only have to wait for as long as it took to get the bastard alone…

… and then he would allow the monster inside free reign to do as it pleased.
The familiar hooking tug of the portkey faded, and Hermione found herself deposited in the middle of Lucius’ study. It was dark and uninviting as she had never seen it before. Even that first day she had portkeyed in, and the room had all but been torn apart, it had held more life than it did now. The fire, always roaring, was cold and long dead. The curtains were drawn leaving only slivers of sunlight shining through the tall windows to provide the room with any illumination at all.

Hermione walked forward slowly, the sound of her footsteps swallowed by the plush carpet. The chair behind his massive desk sat empty, but on the desk a familiar black and silver cane rested as if its owner had merely laid it down and would return momentarily. She reached out for it, feeling the cool metal of the serpentine head beneath her fingers, it’s emerald eyes winking at her in the dim light.

“Granger?” Hermione whirled around, startled at the unexpected voice. She had waited for confirmation in the *Prophet* that the Ministry's aurors had concluded their search, but she hadn't even thought about the possibility of anyone else being present in the manor.

There he stood: the bane of her existence for four and a half years. She hadn't even heard him enter the study. Little had changed about him, he was a little taller, but now she saw more of his father in him than ever. His face was no longer as pointed and thin as she remembered.

“What in Merlin's bloody name are you doing in my house?! How did you get in my house?” he spat venomously.

“That's quite enough, Draco.” An elegant, statuesque blonde witch that could only be Narcissa Malfoy was framed in the open doorway behind him. She, unlike her son, did not appear surprised to see her in their home.

“But mother-” he began, only to be cut off abruptly.

“We're nearly finished here. Why don't you return to the villa?” The tone in her voice made it clear that her words were not a suggestion. “I shall be along presently.”

Draco shot one last glare at her, equal parts confusion and anger, but he turned and left the study without another word, though he did look back before rounding the corner, and there was more confusion in his eyes than anything else as he did so. And then he was gone, almost as if he had never been there at all, and Hermione was left alone with the imposing blond witch, wondering what was going to happen next.

“Awaiting its master's return.” Narcissa Malfoy gestured behind Hermione, and only then did she realize her hand still rested on Lucius’ serpent-headed cane.

She snatched her hand back guiltily, wiping her palm against her denim-clad leg, as though she could wipe away her association with its owner.

“Mrs. Malfoy,” Hermione greeted nervously. Her hushed voice echoed hollowly in the room.

The elder witch swept into the study, her formal robes whispering across the floor in her wake. Narcissa came to a halt in front of her, her shrewd eyes studying her face critically. “And you are
“Hermione Granger I take it?”

“Yes,” she squeaked. Narcissa’s eyes raked over her again.

“I was hoping we would get the chance to speak.” There was a quality to her voice that made Hermione nervous, and then Narcissa smiled unexpectedly.

She waved her wand and the wall sconces and fireplace flared to life. “Would you care for tea, Miss Granger?”

Hermione could tell that just as it had been with Draco, it was a command she could not refuse rather than any kind of invitation.

Hermione sat fidgeting in the leather chair as Narcissa took a seat across from her. She seemed a little too calm to Hermione for someone who had just found a stranger in their home. A small house elf handed her a cup and saucer. Her hands shook as she accepted it and she tried to silence the chatter of the china.

“Thank you,” she whispered to the tiny creature. It looked at her curiously before nodding once and returning to its mistress’ side. Narcissa picked up her own cup with a nod and the elf stood at attention near her chair.

“You seem nervous, Miss Granger,” Narcissa stated airily, raising her cup to her lips.

“A bit, I suppose.” Hermione hadn't expected Narcissa to be at the manor, she never had been before, but how exactly did one go about telling that to the owner of their own home?

“Do you truly find me so intimidating?” Narcissa stared at her with eyes narrowed ever so slightly.

“Honestly, I- I’m not quite sure what to think, Mrs. Malfoy,” Hermione replied, dropping her gaze as she stirred her tea with forced, measured strokes. Why wasn't she asking what Hermione was doing there? That would have been her first question. They never would have gotten to the tea.

“Hmm,” the witch hummed in reply, taking another delicate sip. What in Godric’s name is that supposed to mean!?! Hermione thought in exasperation, raising the cup to her lips in an effort to cover her discomfort.

After a moment of silence, Narcissa added, as though she were merely commenting on a change in the weather, "If you're here, I take it you plan to continue my husband's work?"

Somehow Hermione managed not to choke on her tea. “I beg your pardon? I'm not sure-”

Narcissa laughed, sending a chill racing down Hermione's spine. “Oh there's no need to play coy dear, though I do appreciate the effort. I am certain Lucius does as well. You aren't here snooping around for the Ministry. For one thing, you're far too young for that.”

Hermione gaped at the other witch incredulously. She closed her mouth with a snap after several moments of her jaw hanging open embarrassingly. “You know?”

Narcissa inclined her head in acknowledgement.

“He said no one else knew,” she replied quietly.
“And no one else does. With Draco involved, it wasn’t exactly a secret he could keep from me. He 
did leave something here for you then? I wondered.”

“Yes, it's-”

“No, do not tell me.” Narcissa replied quickly. “I know what he is attempting to accomplish. I am not privy to the details. The less I know, the better. I simply wish to extend to you an offer.”

“What offer?” Hermione asked, curious despite her apprehension.

“Lucius can be thorough, irritatingly so, but that trait is undeniably handy. It is unlikely that he missed anything, but it has been known to happen on occasion. I merely wish to grant you permission to take anything else you think you may need with you.”

“Why would you be willing to do such a thing?”

Narcissa raised an elegant brow as though Hermione had asked an incredibly stupid question. “Since my family's hopes for the future lie with you, I would prefer to see you well-equipped.”

In hindsight, given Narcissa's reply, Hermione supposed it wasn't the most intelligent question she had ever asked.

Neither said anything for several minutes. Hermione could tell that Narcissa was studying her, even though she didn't appear to be looking at her at all. She could feel it as an uncomfortable prickle on the back of her neck. Hermione observed Narcissa as well, though she surely wasn't nearly as discreet about it, and the woman she observed was more elegant and beautiful than she had even imagined her to be.

Hermione was the first to finally break the silence, unable to hold herself back any longer. “Mr. Malfoy was badly injured before his arrest. Did he receive proper treatment?”

She knew it was poor taste to inquire after another woman's husband, but she had to know. They were partners after all, and Narcissa was already fully aware of that fact, so it wasn't as if the question was completely out of place.

Narcissa cleared her throat delicately before speaking. “Lucius most recently met with his solicitor Friday last. He had another round of treatment remaining at that time, but I am told he was well on his way to full recovery.”

“Told?” Hermione paled. “You mean you haven't seen him?”

“Lucius has seen no one, save for his solicitor and his appointed healer.” Narcissa fixed her with a hard stare.

“Did you not see the papers?” Hermione asked incredulously. "He was seriously injured. How could you not have visited?”

“I cannot be seen to have sanctioned his actions in the Ministry.”

She held up a hand to forestall any further protestations.

“I have a son to protect, Miss Granger and right now that means protecting him from being tainted by his father which shall be a feat in and of itself. Lucius must be seen to have been acting alone. As far as anyone knows, or will know, Draco and I have not even set foot outside France.”
“He's in Azkaban. That place is...”

It was a nightmare; full of dementors and despair. Hermione couldn't believe that Narcissa could have visited him and had made the decision not to. She didn't even seem all that bothered by it.

“Lucius is more resilient than you might believe. Azkaban will not break him. He'll do what he must. As will we all.” She sounded so reasonable, so certain.

Hermione didn't share Narcissa's confidence. She had seen Sirius not long after he had escaped during third year. He'd been more than half mad. She didn't want that for Lucius too.

“Tell me, Miss Granger, why the fate of my husband should concern you so much.”

An insidious edge crept into Narcissa's tone as it turned accusatory, and Hermione was immediately on alert.

“I am aware that you've been fucking him. Did you manage to fall in love with him too?”

Hermione’s cup and saucer crashed to the floor as her breath caught in her throat.

Oh shit, thought Hermione in a panic. She knows.

Suddenly Narcissa's strange behavior, welcoming an obvious trespasser into her home, made perfect sense to Hermione.

“Mrs. Malfoy-” she began, panic lacing her voice.

“Sif,” the other witch commanded in a disinterested tone. Her eyes were anything but disinterested as they bore into her. The elf had it cleaned in moments and was extending a new cup to her before Hermione even recovered from her shock.

Narcissa didn't seem affected at all and took another delicate sip, her eyes locked on Hermione's own over the rim of the cup.

“Well then, Miss Granger? Out with it. Are you in love with my husband?” she asked as she finally set aside her cup on the nearby side table.

Hermione's heart clenched and her stomach twisted. She had never allowed herself to examine her feelings too deeply. She had always pushed them aside, buried them deep down where she couldn't look at them.

Lucius had never seemed interested in kindling anything beyond the physical relationship they had established. He had expressly warned her that there was no hope of a future for them. It had made her growing feelings easier to ignore. She hadn't allowed herself to consider more, had never dared give it voice.

Only now, Narcissa Malfoy had voiced the question she had been avoiding for months. She was demanding an answer, and forcing her to confront her feelings. Forced now to do so, Hermione realized with gut-wrenching certainty why his apparent betrayal, at the time, in the Department of Mysteries had hurt so much.

“Tell me, Hermione,” Narcissa urged.

It was the first time Narcissa had used her given name, and she felt compelled to answer the other witch, her voice little more than an exhale. “Yes... I'm in love with him.”
She closed her eyes in shame at her confession, turning away to hide her face.

“I tried not to be.”

As if that made her behavior any better.

"I am aware of just how charming Lucius can be," Narcissa replied knowingly.

“How long have you known that he and I…” She just couldn't bring herself to say it aloud even now.

“I have known of your physical relationship for months. He returned to the manor one day positively reeking of sex.”

Narcissa could only be speaking of the day they had met at Hogwarts if she was the one in question.

“Honestly, I have no idea how he managed to avoid suspicion. It was rather obvious what he'd been up to.”

Hermione pleaded, her words coming out in a rush, “Please Mrs. Malfoy, I’m sorry. I've made no demands of him. I never even planned to tell-”

“You misunderstand my reasons for asking, Miss Granger.” There was a new quality in Narcissa's voice that gave Hermione pause.

She looked at her elf and dismissed it with a wave of her hand in order to devote her entire attention to Hermione. “I ask because, were you inclined to pursue Lucius, I would support you. You would do so with my blessing.”

No sound escaped Hermione's mouth as she opened and closed it in confusion. “What? I don't- How could you possibly approve of...”

“Oh yes, I forget that you aren't aware of certain pure-blood customs.” Narcissa waved her hand nonchalantly.

“Although I suppose it isn't exactly a commonplace one. Assuming they aren't the aggressors, many pure-blood wives find themselves in the unenviable position of needing to defend against sudden, untimely deaths; either from their husbands or their husband's mistresses.”

She looked Hermione up and down with a critical eye.

“Everything I've heard about you suggests that you have no interest in material wealth.”

“No! I would never dream of killing someone over… things.” The thought was absolutely repulsive to her.

“Which is why you are the only one I have ever considered having this particular conversation with.”

A frown slashed across Hermione's brow. The unexpected turn in the conversation still had her reeling, but she was starting to regain her bearings, and some things, finally, were beginning to fall into place.

"So, you're not angry?"
Narcissa just smiled.

"You were just having a laugh?!?"

"Well, naturally. There's little point in being viewed as the aggrieved wife if you don't take advantage of it when you can."

Hermione wondered if it was a Slytherin thing, that twisted sense of humor. Lucius had it. Professor Snape did too. She looked at Narcissa again and took in her bearing and perfect dress and her undeniable, elegant beauty. What Narcissa was proposing was unthinkable. "Lucius told me that the two of you weren't intimate. Is that true?"

"You doubted him, I take it."

Hermione nodded reluctantly, not that she really thought Lucius had been lying, but especially after meeting Narcissa, she just couldn't see how it could have been true. They looked like they belonged together.

"Lucius and I are incompatible, Miss Granger. I was aware of that when we were still at Hogwarts, long before I ever accepted his proposal. He had quite the reputation in school, though he never lacked for partners."

"And you were never jealous of them?"

A quick shake of her head. "No. Lucius has been an ideal husband, I'm glad it was him, but he was always too intense for my liking. I take it you are aware of his… preferences?"

Hermione nodded. That was certainly a delicate way of putting it.

"All of them?" Narcissa asked, lifting a brow. She held Hermione's gaze searchingly. "No. No, I don't think you are."

"Do you mean-"

"My dear, if you already knew you wouldn't need to ask. It isn't as though it could be mistaken for something else. He said he was going to tell you," and her voice trailed off thoughtfully.

Narcissa gave her a curious look. "Did something happen, I wonder…"

Hermione's eyes went wide. "Actually, I- well I think something did."

She reluctantly informed Narcissa of the state in which she had found Lucius at the beginning of the Easter holidays, glossing over the more intimate details of their encounter. It didn't matter if Narcissa didn't mind, it was still a subject she wasn't comfortable discussing with the older woman.

The look on Narcissa's face worried her. She was clearly concerned by his behavior, her confidence wavering for the first time.

"Did he tell you? Is that how you know?"

"Hmm, oh yes," Narcissa answered, rousing herself from her thoughts. "Our families had already finalized our betrothal. The proposal was a formality, shocking only for the secrets he confessed, secrets even the Hogwarts rumor mill had failed to uncover."

Narcissa smiled wistfully as if thinking of something long past. "We did make the attempt, but in the end we were too different. I do love Lucius, not as you do, but he is not merely the father of my
son nor simply a friend.”

Hermione could hear the unspoken threat in her words. It was the first time Narcissa had actually threatened her, and it was a warning against breaking her husband's heart. It was a strange relationship indeed.

“I have no intention of hurting him.”

“You say that now, but don't even know his deepest secrets.”

“I still know what he is,” Hermione replied insistently.

“I do hope so.”

Hermione sighed. "It's a bit of a moot point though, isn't it? Five years is a long time. Even if Azkaban doesn't drive him insane, I don't even know if either of us will be the same people five years from now.”

"You don't believe he'll serve the full sentence, just as I don't. So what is the real issue?” Narcissa asked, calling her bluff.

She didn't really want to talk with Narcissa about her concerns, but there was no one else she could speak candidly with because no one else knew the truth. There was more than one reason she had never let that damning word slip into her vocabulary.

"If he knows that I… love him- What if he loses interest?"

"What if the one who loses interest is you ?"

Hermione's head snapped up, and she locked eyes with the woman across from her. She didn't think it likely, but realized that it was a possibility, just as it was for him.

"Nothing is certain, Hermione, but I do know that when Lucius returned from Hogwarts, he was happy, and it was because of you. Whether or not that's love is a question only he can answer."

Narcissa closed her eyes briefly and sighed. She stood without saying a word and moved with graceful steps to the nearest window, pushing aside the drawn curtains so that the late afternoon sun illuminated her face. It was several minutes before she finally spoke.

"I love Lucius deeply in my own way. He doesn’t know, but when we were wed, I vowed that I would one day ensure his happiness. I think he could have that with you, but not unless he reveals himself completely. I don't know why he hasn't. Perhaps he is still afraid. He must be...

Hermione recalled the horror in his eyes, his flight of terror, all because of a single misplaced request.

"He is afraid." Hermione whispered, half to herself. "What exactly is he afraid of?"

“Lucius really should be the one to tell you.” Narcissa's eyes were fixed on something beyond the window, and her voice was soft when she said, "For his sake, I do hope you truly possess the integrity I've heard so much about, Miss Granger."

Hermione had no answer for her. What could she possibly say to that? Apparently no response was necessary, because Narcissa didn't wait for one.

"Abraxas was a terrible man, and he was even worse as a father."
"I've heard. I've seen," and there was no mistaking the venom in Hermione's voice.

Narcissa didn't seem surprised by the news. "Like most pure-bloods from prominent families, Abraxas believed the purity of one's blood made one special, above all others. He drilled that certainty in Lucius' head from a young age. I don't think I need to tell you how easily impressionable young minds can be shaped."

“No,” Hermione murmured.

The other witch nodded absently, her gaze still fixed on the horizon. “Despite his teachings, Lucius did not become the blood supremacist his father wanted him to be."

Hermione had already come to that conclusion on her own, based on the time she had already spent with him. No blood supremacist would have done a tenth of the things Lucius had done with her.

“Have you spent enough time with him to notice his… odd peculiarities? How he speaks? How he thinks? How he behaves?"

Hermione closed her eyes briefly, choking back a wave of emotion, and nodded even though the other witch couldn’t see. What Narcissa spoke of had been the source of much of the contention in their relationship. “It’s terrible how he believes that he’s less important than his name, that he exists only to further his line. He doesn’t believe he deserves more.”

"I see you have spent time with him.” Narcissa sounded impressed, and her voice was tinged with both affection and concern that echoed Hermione’s own.

“All of it was learned at Abraxas’ feet, and Lucius clearly learned. So, that begs the question, doesn’t it?” Narcissa continued. “In the face of such overwhelming indoctrination, if Lucius did not become a blood supremacist, what then did he become?”

Narcissa finally turned to look at her, and Hermione couldn't help but think she was missing something important, something that she should know but had perhaps forgotten. She gasped as her hand flew to her mouth, the memory striking suddenly like a bolt of lightning: Lucius on top of her not ten feet from where she now sat, teeth set against her throat right above the pulsing thrum of her jugular, and the rapid fire beat of his heart pounding in his chest. He’d been so hard, and so obviously uninterested in fucking as he had feasted on her throat like he could crawl inside her veins. She remembered quite clearly just how close he had been to biting down, and how he had torn himself away from her before he could.

Hermione knew with absolute certainty that when it came to blood purity Lucius had not learned what Abraxas had sought to teach him, but he had clearly learned something else.

Chapter End Notes

I really loved writing this version of Narcissa! Hope you enjoyed it!
So, it's been a while... You know, I had all these big plans to do a lot of writing while between semesters, and then my muse decided to go on vacation. This chapter was actually really hard to write, because I had two different directions to go in and couldn't decide for the longest time which way I was heading. Hope you enjoy. It might be a little while before the next chapter. I've got some other stuff I want to finish up first.

The dementors had abandoned Azkaban, but the decades, possibly centuries of their residence had leached despair into every stone and crevice of the prison. As a result, the place was frigid in a way that went deeper than the cutting wind whipping through the slit windows from the North Sea. Lucius lay on the stone floor, shivering in fitful slumber under the single blanket the guards had thrown at him… well, he wasn't sure when. With nothing to do and only the same grey patch of sky to look at, the days were already starting to bleed together.

One guard's booted foot connected with his stomach in a wake-up call that was becoming an unwelcome familiarity. Lucius bit back his grunt of pain as he curled in on himself against the wall, his hands instinctively coming up to protect his face.

“Get on your feet, Malfoy!” the gruff voice above him ordered, though Lucius was reluctant to move. His left eye was still blackened from his last encounter with this particular brute.

One kick was apparently all the guard was interested in, because the next moment he was hauled to his feet by vice-like fingers digging into his upper arms, and unceremoniously slammed against the cell wall.

The sheer force of the impact knocked the breath from his lungs. The chains binding him rattled noisily, the metal biting into his wrists. He'd been shackled hand and foot to the wall like a mad dog since his Ministry-appointed healer had cleared him even though it was completely unnecessary. Azkaban was a fortress after all. It wasn't like he was going anywhere.

It wasn't as if he needed three guards either, but ever since the healer’s final visit there were always three, and they had kept him well-guarded. He didn't know if it was for their protection or his, though he suspected the former. Why they would need such protection was beyond him. He was wandless and outnumbered and they all looked like they could beat him to a bloody pulp without any help whatsoever.

Two of his guards set about unlocking his restraints while the third kept a close watch on him. He was the one who spoke, the same one who had kicked him previously. “The warden wants to see you. Give us any trouble and the healer will be back a lot sooner than she expected.”

The man tapped a short, solid-looking stick against the side of his leg. He looked like he was itching for Lucius to give him a reason to use it.

“I won't be any trouble,” he replied quietly, eyeing the club warily. That would be exceedingly
foolish. Causing trouble would gain him nothing in this place. Lucius' shoulders rounded slightly as he shrank back against the wall behind him in a non-threatening manner. Better that they believe him beaten into submission than risk the alternative.

“Good,” though he sounded disappointed to Lucius' ears.

The guard nodded at his companions, who secured him once more at wrists and ankles, a length of attached chain linking the two together. The whole thing hobbled his steps, forcing him to move with care lest he topple over onto his face. It took a long time to get to the warden’s office four flights up and on the opposite side of the prison. His lower back ached terribly by the time they reached it.

The guard in charge rapped on the door loudly with his club and then opened it, pushing Lucius through with a hand on his shoulder. The door closed behind them and was locked, his other two jailers taking up positions on either side of it, watching him get manhandled across the room until he came to a stop in front of the warden’s desk.

A man, the warden, Lucius assumed, stood at the window seemingly ignoring their arrival. Lucius glanced at his surroundings. The desk before him was relatively clean save for the half finished dinner. His stomach rumbled, and he moved his gaze quickly on, taking in the fire roaring in the hearth that helped dispel the chill in the room. A partition blocked off the far corner, but Lucius could make out a bed beyond it. Considering its dual nature, the room was fairly well furnished. He hadn't expected such in a prison.

The man standing at the window was just as physically intimidating as the rest of them. He was a little shorter than Lucius himself, but stocky and heavily muscled, a result of having spent his life in the system he assumed. Lucius was quite certain the warden didn't need any other guards watching over him while they spoke. With no magic allowed here, in a fortress, in the middle of the ocean, Lucius couldn't imagine fighting back against any single one of them. The warden stepped away from the window back towards the desk and gave him a once over, nodding curtly at the other man. Lucius felt the hand drop off his shoulder.

"Seems like they patched you up well enough." Lucius nodded hesitantly. The warden's gaze lingered on his eye, but he didn't comment on it.

"The Ministry made your stay official today." He reached into his desk drawer and pulled out a piece of parchment bearing the official seal of the Ministry of Magic, then he threw it down on the wooden surface in front of Lucius, before coming back around to the front and taking a seat on the edge.

"Caught red-handed and they give you five fucking years…" The warden shook his head in disbelief. "I'll bet you burned a lot of favors to pull that off."

Lucius didn't respond, but the man wasn't wrong. He was pretty much tapped out. Apparently people didn't like being associated with a known Death Eater. Some of them had taken quite a lot of convincing.

"Don’t know if you’re familiar with muggle prison systems, but I suppose you will be soon enough. As you can imagine, things are different here since the dementors left."

"Which the public doesn't know," Lucius stated, speaking for the first time since entering the room.

The warden smiled nastily. "Of course not. If word got out there would be mass panic. Those
things aren't exactly friendly."

"They may be gone, but don’t expect it to be all fun and games here," he continued and glanced behind Lucius before meeting his eyes once more. "You'll be sorely disappointed if you think my men aren't trained to run this place, though I suppose you've gotten a taste of their expertise already."

Lucius turned his head to glance at the guard behind him, shifting slightly on his feet. He couldn’t deny it. The guards were far too comfortable in their roles to be new at them.

"You know what they are, don't you?"

And what you are too, Lucius thought but didn't say aloud. He nodded instead. It didn't take much to deduce where Azkaban's new guard force came from, considering the statute of secrecy was a factor.

The warden was clearly waiting for his response, so he cleared his throat and reluctantly murmured, "Squibs."

Lucius received a satisfied nod in return.

"Most worked for me at Nurmengard, caring for our special guest there. The remaining few were brought back from the muggle world. They were offered an opportunity here, and jumped at the chance. Most of them didn't even work in the prison system, but they took to their new roles remarkably well."

The warden smirked at Lucius. "Turns out the ones who took the job really hate wizards. Can't imagine why."

One of the guards laughed behind him.

"Don't worry. All you have to do is cooperate, and my men won't need to remind you of your place here."

He favored Lucius with a thoughtful look.

"As for your fellow prisoners, I can't make any promises. Even in Azkaban there are a lot of people who lost family during the war. I don't blame them for wanting a little payback and we don't have any nice, cozy, little Death Eater cells left after that breakout. If you want to make it to the end of your sentence, I'd advise you to watch your back and try to make some new friends. Guards don't get involved in disputes here. They're here to make sure you don't get out. You'll remain in solitary tonight and my men will move you into general tomorrow." He waved his hand dismissively at the guard behind him.

The hand returned to his shoulder, pulling him back towards the door.

“No, wait!” Lucius exclaimed quickly, shrugging out of his guard's grasp, and hoping he didn’t receive a blow to the back of his skull for his trouble. The warden held up a hand, and Lucius shuddered to think just how close he had come.

“I need to know what happened at the Ministry. I've been told nothing…” Despite how much he'd pleaded with his solicitor he remained completely in the dark.

The warden shook his head. “The Wizengamot believes, and I tend to agree, that the less informed you are about the outside world, the better. After all, we don't want to make another breakout
"I'll pay you," Lucius insisted vehemently.

The warden scoffed at the notion. “I know you don’t have a single knut on you, Malfoy. So, sorry, but the offer falls a little flat.”

He looked past his shoulder at the guard. “Take him back to his cell.”

"No!" Lucius emphatically shrugged off the guard's hand once more, and the warden put a halt to the scuffle immediately. The irritation was clear on his face.

"Humor me then. What is so damned important to you that you'd risk a cracked skull?"

"Just a cracked skull, boss?"

The warden just shrugged his shoulders noncommittally, and Lucius took a surreptitious step away from the man behind him.

"I just need to know. Please. The Wizengamot is being paranoid. You know there's nothing I could do with the information anyway." The warden seemed to consider his words. He didn't answer immediately. "I suppose that might be the case. So, let's revisit the offer then."

"Right," Lucius sighed in relief. "Would five hundred galleons be sufficient?"

A pair of eyebrows shot up in surprise. “Is that the going rate?”

“It depends,” Lucius began hesitantly, “on the value of the information, but yes, typically.”

The warden nodded. “And that’s five hundred each? Right?”

"Yes, of course."

He was considering it, Lucius could tell, leaning back against his desk, arms crossed and fingers tapping thoughtfully. Lucius certainly hadn't enjoyed his stay in Azkaban thus far, but he had to admit that there were advantages to the dementors yielding their ownership of the prison. Dementors couldn't be bought or bargained with the way a guard could.

"You make a convincing case, Malfoy. We have a deal." He extended his hand, an unmistakable smirk on his face. "We'll take our payment now, if you please..."

"Well, I would first need to contact Gringott’s and-"

"No, no," the man interrupted. “No transfers. No outside parties. We deal now or we don’t deal at all." The warden paused, tilting his head as if suddenly remembering something important.

"Oh, right. You don't have a single knut on you. Do you, Malfoy?"

Lucius remained silent, his jaws clenched, the man behind him chuckling as the warden grinned broadly.

"I guess we should renegotiate then," he shrugged nonchalantly. "The question is what do you
"Well, he is awfully pretty, boss." Lucius grimaced as the guard spoke up behind him, a shudder rolling down his spine when fingers brushed the hair away from his neck.

"Hmm," the warden hummed in agreement, looking at Lucius now like he might be a tasty treat. "I suppose he is, and it would take care of our little problem."

"You see," he addressed Lucius, "we don't get off the island often, and it's terribly expensive to have company sent here. The ladies don't really like it, but then I can't really blame them either. The place isn't really all that cheerful."

He took an involuntary step backwards, only to be stopped by the guard at his back. Lucius knew exactly the kind of company the warden meant, and he knew that he wasn't leaving the warden's office the same way he had entered it.

He paused, his hands clenched into fists, head bowed slightly in consideration as he let the warden's words register. His voice was hollow when he spoke. "Provide me with news and protection… and I-I'll pay you."

The warden looked suitably unimpressed. He remained leaning against his desk, his arms crossed in front of him.

"Protection?" he asked incredulously, his voice slipping into a dangerous octave. "What makes you think I'm inclined to accept that offer? You know I could just take it from you."

"You could," Lucius agreed. There was no denying that, "and I couldn't stop you, but how many times have you played out that scenario? Surely that game is growing a little stale?"

All the air seemed to go out of the room, its occupants holding their breath as the warden considered Lucius' words. He sank to his knees in resignation in front of the warden, accompanied by the clink of his chains. His shackles clinked noisily as he reached for the man's fly, his hands hovering a hair's breadth from touching him. "Just once, you could have someone who won't fight you, whom you wouldn't have to pay."

The warden scoffed, smirking broadly. "I pay for whores, Malfoy, because they know what they're doing. Don't imagine I'd ever be paying for you."

One hand remained where it was; so close and yet so far away. His other landed lightly on the warden's thigh. A slight tremble ran through his fingers, and Lucius cleared his throat before speaking.

"I can make it worth your while, and it isn't as though information costs you anything anyway."

"True," he conceded. "When you put it that way, I suppose it does seem like a good deal."

"News and protection," Lucius offered once again, "but my deal is with you."

Lucius heard a sound of protest behind him, and the warden shook his head. "My men will be the ones protecting you, if I were to accept your offer. You don't really think they're going to work for free?"

He'd been expecting the statement even as he had hoped to avoid such a fate. It was still a better option than his alternatives.
He heard the three behind him move closer but didn't turn around. “No,” he replied morosely, his hand finally making contact with the front of the warden's trousers.

“I doubt they'll be nice to you.”

Lucius caressed the growing bulge beneath his hand. “I know,” and even he could hear just how vulnerable he sounded in those two small words.

There was a long silence between them, the light clink of Lucius’ chains the only noise in the room aside from the crackle of the fire.

Lucius held his breath waiting for the warden to respond. At last, the man came to his decision, and he spoke, sealing their bargain in the process.

"Most of your associates were captured. A few escaped, but I'm sure it won't be for long. The escapee, Black, died at the Ministry, and everyone knows your master is back."

Lucius was shocked, not having realized that Sirius Black had, indeed, shown himself in the end, and he let the words sink in for a moment, not quite sure how he felt about the news. He had always known Black as an annoying, arrogant brat, though to be fair, he also hadn't seen him since he had been disowned. The man was- had been family, and he supposed that alone was enough to dictate his feelings on the matter.

"And who escaped?" he asked, his voice, little more than a hollow sound. He dreaded the answer, but needed to know.

The warden glanced down at Lucius' hands. "Is that really the best you can do? Go on."

At the warden's command, Lucius came back to himself, realizing that he had been so focused on the news that he had neglected the man before him. Clearly the warden was finished talking until he continued. He unbuttoned the warden’s trousers and fished out his half-hard cock with trembling fingers.

The warden finally uncrossed his arms and placed his hands on the desk behind him.

"That's it. It's just like playing with your own," he murmured.

Lucius moved his hand, his strokes growing surer as the flesh beneath his fingers filled with blood and stood at attention. He opened his mouth to speak again when the warden groaned and finally gave Lucius the information he sought.

"Mmm… that bitch, Lestrange got away. It's too bad. She killed my sister-in-law. I was really looking forward to torturing her."

He bucked his hips slightly against Lucius' fist, urging him to tighten his grasp, reaching down to guide Lucius' hand. "And Dolohov, he got away too."

It was probably for the best that the warden had taken over, because Lucius froze upon hearing the one name he had been sure he wouldn't hear. The floor fell out from beneath Lucius' knees as all his plans crumbled into dust. He was on his knees with the warden's cock in his hand and three other goons slavering for a piece of him for the express purpose of getting close enough to Dolohov to slit his throat, and now he would have to wait until his release to do so anyway.

And then the man before him spoke again, and Lucius thought his heart had actually stopped beating.
"As for the Order, they're banged up, but otherwise unharmed." The warden sounded pleased by his own answer, certain that it was the opposite of what Lucius wanted to hear. He didn't realize that he had just righted Lucius' entire world after tearing it out from under him.

"No casualties?" Lucius breathed in utter disbelief.

"Seems your Death Eaters aren't as effective as you'd hoped." He laughed, along with his guards. "You couldn't even kill a bunch of children."

It took every bit of self control that Lucius possessed to suppress the visible reaction of relief the unexpected news brought him. He had wallowed in despair at the thought that his actions had led to Hermione's death. He had berated himself, certain that if he had only left her alone, had recruited someone else, he wouldn't have been responsible for her death. And he had already made plans to take out the man who had cast the spell regardless of the consequences for himself.

The tumult of elation raging inside was almost more than he could stand. Hermione was alive, and the mission remained in her capable hands. It was as much as he could hope for, and much more than he had dreamed possible.

A hand on the side of his face, calloused fingertips running down his cheek to stroke over his jaw roused Lucius from his thoughts. He met the warden's heated gaze reluctantly. "You really are rather pretty, aren't you?"

Lucius turned his face, scowling slightly.

“What, are you going to be stubborn now?"

There was laughter all around him, and several pairs of hands smoothed over his back, caressing his rigid shoulders possessively. The warden tilted his chin up, forcing Lucius to meet his eyes again.

"Thinking of revenge when you finally get out of here?" Lucius dropped his gaze, breaking eye contact. "I'll assume that's a yes then. There's just one problem with that. You come looking for revenge, and folk are gonna wonder why."

"No one would-"

"Wouldn't they? Are you ready to risk your reputation on that?" The warden's hand stopped stroking his face, and slid around to the back of his head. "Now why don't you open on up, hmm?"

Lucius wet his lips and opened his mouth obediently. A miserable little whimper left him as the warden gripped the back of his head, guiding him closer, and slowly pushed his cock between Lucius' lips.

"I'll make you another deal, Malfoy. You be a good little boy, do as we say, and don't cause trouble, and my guards will look out for you; keep those filthy prisoners off you. You let all this go when you're out, and your fellow prisoners never even have to know why you're being protected. They can think the Ministry wants you alive for information or something for all I care. They don't have to know the details, and that reputation you prize so much gets to stay intact."

Lucius made another little sound of protest and then stopped resisting in a show of silent acquiescence. The hands running over his shoulders and back grew bolder, slipping beneath his shirt.

“Don't worry, sweetheart,” the warden whispered to Lucius, carding his fingers through his hair in a disgusting display of false affection.
“We'll make sure you stay pretty,” he traced a finger lightly over the bruise around his eye, but still didn't comment on it, and then finished with a shrug, "for this place anyway. Wouldn't want to use you up too soon.”

He pulled Lucius' hair, gripping tightly to guide his movements, and murmured instructions to him. Lucius felt someone kneel down behind him at the same time he felt several pairs of hands caress his lower back and begin to tug his loose prison pants off his hips.

“I'm sure all my boys are going to want some time with you once word gets out,” the man groaned as Lucius set to his task, reluctantly mouthing at the veined flesh sliding across his tongue.

“He'll remain in solitary the rest of the week to give the boys a chance to play. Make sure the others know the details,” he was saying to one of his guards, “and if they aren't clean, they don’t get to play with my pretty, new toy.”

“Yes, Sir,” came the reply from right next to Lucius' ear. A set of teeth clamped down on that ear, a tongue curling around the lobe.

The warden’s grip on him tightened and he started to thrust more forcefully in a rhythm that was just slow enough that someone who had never sucked cock before would be able to handle the pace.

Barely.

Lucius choked for good measure, struggling beneath the hands holding him in place.

"Oh, don't worry. You'll get better at it."

The guard behind him laughed and added, "We'll make sure you get plenty of practice."

A moment later there was cool air at his back as the man pushed away from him. The warden wouldn't let him turn his head to look though.

Lucius was under no illusion that the next five years would be easy. He wouldn't get any special consideration. That wasn't what he was buying. Some of the guards might be gentle with him. Most would be cruel. It was the type of personality the job attracted. He had realized that early on when it seemed as though the guards couldn't help but abuse him.

He had realized, also, that there couldn't possibly be enough guards for every prisoner to be confined to their own cell. People were lazy, and mealtimes alone would take hours, not to mention separated prisoners provided little in the way of entertainment, and that was where the real danger for him would be found. He was now a known Death Eater, outed, and even in this place there would be people out for his blood.

The choice then became to either take his chances with the other prisoners or with the guards. With the other prisoners he faced death, after they took what they wanted from him, that was. The guards at least had a vested interest in keeping him intact. It had not been a difficult choice to make.

Yes, he would be woken from a dead sleep by a cock shoved halfway down his throat, or taken against the wall like a common whore. He would probably be funneled away to the barracks, so he could entertain them, a half dozen at a time. Or more. And always, he would be at the warden’s beck and call, no matter how many he had already ‘entertained’ that day, but he would be protected from the other prisoners, the ones who didn't care if he was, indeed, the Death Eater who had killed their loved ones, though the odds were good that he was responsible for at least a few. The
guards would protect him from them, and Azkaban would protect him from Voldemort.

He gasped and whimpered around the rigid flesh in his mouth, the taste of precome an afterthought as his attention focused elsewhere. There were slick fingers already probing deeply within him, and he shifted on his knees, widening his stance in an attempt to ease their entry. The burning pain in his arse proclaimed too many, too fast, and there was little he could do but endure it. Lucius counted himself lucky he was even being prepared at all.

The whole ordeal was the best of a bad situation, but it still beat the alternative. At least he was alive and likely to remain that way; to serve out his sentence and see the outside world once more. There were certain advantages to the dementors yielding control of the prison island after all. Dementors couldn't be bought or bargained with the way a guard could be, and they couldn't be manipulated the way a guard could be either.

It wasn't like it was the first time Lucius had sold himself to get something he wanted. He'd be getting more out of it this time than the last though, and much more than he had been expecting when he had set foot inside the warden’s office. When he had crossed the threshold, he had known that Hermione had been dead, and there had existed the possibility that Dolohov was within reach. He had been willing to offer himself to the warden and his men if it meant getting Dolohov alone, only that wasn’t what the guards had wanted from him. That had been made evident by the disappointment when he had offered no resistance in his cell. And then he had discovered that beyond all hope Hermione was alive even if Dolohov was beyond his reach. He was more than willing to let the guards believe whatever they wanted if it meant that he ended up getting what he wanted.

Someone behind him grew impatient, ripping the shirt from his body so hands could roam possessively over the bare skin of his shoulders and down his spine. Those same hands fisted in his hair, pushing forward, and shoving him all the way down on the warden’s leaking cock. Lucius gagged and whimpered and struggled appropriately through the forced deepthroating, earning a moan of appreciation from the man he serviced, knowing that the more he pleased him the less inclined he would be to allow his men to damage him. He needed every advantage, no matter how small, in order to survive this. Hopefully it wouldn’t take Hermione five years to find and destroy the remaining horcruxes, but he hated the thought of the danger she faced going at it alone. He needed to get back in the fight.

Quite suddenly his mouth and throat were mercifully empty, and then the warden stepped aside, and he found himself lifted to his feet and forcibly shoved across the desk in front of him. The chain attaching his wrists to his ankles bit into his stomach, the metal links cold against his limp cock. He started to push himself up onto his elbows when the chain was jerked roughly forward, and he cried out in pain, bucking away from the frigid metal dragging across his bollocks.

Someone moved the chain to the side thankfully. He looked up through unbidden, unshed tears to find the guard who took such pleasure in hurting him staring back at him with a smirk on his face. It had been on purpose then. The man dragged the chain forward, securing it on a hidden hook beneath the desk, and then stood up. He wasted no time in shedding his uniform and grasping the monster between his legs, grinning as he slapped Lucius in the face with it just before he grabbed the back of Lucius’ head and forced it down his throat.

“What do you know?” he sneered nastily. “You’re already getting better at it.”

Rough hands steadied his hips, and Lucius froze, his eyes going wide as two fingers pressed against his arsehole, corkscrewing into him. He tried to squirm away, but was held fast when something far bigger pressed against him to take their place. The warden was telling him to relax,
to stop fighting, but the panic coursing through him was real and sudden and beyond his control. Lucius didn’t need to fake the sudden fear he felt at what was about to happen, oh gods, what would happen for the next five years. He may have chosen it. That didn’t mean he had ever wanted it. This was not what he had had in mind for his first time with more than one person.

“For fuck’s sake! Hold him down!”

He tried kicking out at a blurred shape moving next to him, but someone had put their boot between his feet, standing on the chain between his ankles and the pants pooled around his feet. Lucius realized suddenly that he was crying, and it wasn’t from the earlier pain or the man fucking his face roughly, but he didn’t have the time or the presence of mind for introspection. His body went rigid as the warden slammed inside him, and he screamed, the sound muffled around the cock filling his throat.

Chapter End Notes

Oh poor, poor Luci... I always end up hurting the ones I love.

For those interested, I'm working on a short little one-shot side story detailing the last time Lucius sold himself. It's one of the things I'm hoping to finish up soon. Bonus points if you can guess what it is! Hint: it's a rare pair. I have alluded to it in a previous chapter, but it was incredibly subtle. really, a 'blink and you'll miss it' sort of thing.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!