"Help me, Granger. Please." "We've got to get back to the castle. What about Harry and Ron?" "It's too dangerous. From now on they're on their own, just like us." Hermione saves Draco from the Death Eaters after he fails to kill Dumbledore. Now they're both in danger and must run, leaving their homes, friends and families behind.
Escape

Chapter 1: Escape

The cool summer breeze swept over the Hogwarts grounds and into the open window of the Gryffindor common room. Hermione Granger sat on the windowsill looking intently across the lawn. She wasn’t sure what she was waiting for, but she couldn’t quell the feeling that something terrible was coming. She kept her wand clenched tightly in her hand as if danger would burst through the door or swoop through the window at any moment. With her other hand she reached into her pocket and subconsciously fingered the half-phial of Felix Felicis and her fake D.A. galleon.

She tore her gaze away from the window for a moment to look at the common room. It was empty save for Ron and Ginny. Ron’s chin rested on his freckled hand, but he was alert, as if listening for anything out of the ordinary. Ginny’s eyelids were beginning to droop, but her wand remained in hand.

Suddenly a deafening bang shattered the silence of the night and an eerie green glow illuminated the sky. Hermione turned back to the window, her heart pounding wildly in her chest. The Dark Mark was hovering ominously over the Astronomy tower.

Ron was by her side in an instant, wand at the ready. Ginny now stood by the portrait hole waiting for them. Hermione took her gulp of Felix and passed it on to Ron before pulling out her D.A. coin.

DEATH EATERS IN CASTLE

The words appeared around the edge of the coin and it burned hot. With no time to waste, the three of them ran from the common room prepared for battle.

They instantly heard shouts and bangs from below and ran towards them. They reached the fourth floor corridor to see ten or so Death Eaters locked in battle with Lupin, Tonks, Bill and McGonagall. They watched in horror as the Death Eater they knew as Fenrir Greyback launched himself, wandless, at Bill, who was momentarily distracted by Bellatrix Lestrange. Greyback sank his teeth into the side of Bill’s face, knocking him to the ground.

Ginny let out a bloodcurdling scream at the sight, alerting the Death Eaters to their presence. Greyback looked up from where Bill lay and grinned at them with blood dripping down his face. “Impedimenta!” Hermione yelled, sending Greyback flying back. She ran forward into the chaos. A Cruciatus curse missed her by inches and she whirled to see a large, masked Death Eater running at her. “Stupefy!” She shouted, watching him crumble.

A blur of white-blond hair streaked by her and she turned to see Malfoy making a break for the stairs to the Astronomy Tower. She shot a stunning spell at him, but missed. He waved his wand, speaking an unheard incantation as he bounded up the stairs. Neville ran after him but was thrown back by an invisible force.

Hermione and Ginny tried a number of spells to break the barrier but none worked. Bellatrix Lestrange’s killing curse missed Ginny so narrowly that Ginny’s hair whipped around her face. Hermione turned to retaliate, but saw that Ron was already running at her in fury.

The Death Eaters were scattering, causing as much damage as they could as they ran down the stairs. Hermione chased after them, sending a stunning spell at one. He turned on his heel and cast a killing curse at her. She threw herself behind a suit of armor just in time and the spell exploded part of the
wall where she had stood a split second earlier.

Four more Death Eaters darted past her towards the entrance hall. She managed to stun one as she chased after them. She was about to enter the entrance hall after them when she thought better of it. She turned back up the corridor to see if any of the Order had followed her, but it seemed they were all still locked in battle. She was alone. She knew that running into an open area against four highly trained Death Eaters was suicide, liquid luck or not. But she couldn’t let them get away. She had to think of a plan.

She heard footsteps from the dungeon stairs and flattened herself against the wall in the shadows. Snape emerged, wand clutched at his side. He turned at the sounds of the destruction in the entrance hall and spotted Hermione.

Her breath caught in her chest as their eyes locked for a moment. Several unidentifiable emotions crossed his face. He took a half step towards her before pausing, turning on his heel, and running up the corridor to where her comrades were still battling the others.

Alone again, she peeked around the corner and saw the Death Eaters making their way towards the exit, casting spells wildly and destroying the class point hourglasses as they did.

A broken window was next to her; if she could get through it, she might be able to skirt around the castle and catch them by surprise. She looked around once more for anyone who might be able to help her. No one. And no time to waste. She used her elbow to knock the jagged shards of glass from the window and hoisted herself through, landing with cat-like agility on the other side.

Keeping to the shadows and moving quickly, she made her way to the cover of trees just within the Forbidden Forest. She turned and peeked out, looking for the Death Eaters. She spotted them running across the lawn. They stopped and looked back towards the Astronomy Tower.

She followed their gaze and had to cover her mouth to keep from screaming. Someone was falling through the air. The person landed with a sickening thud at the base of the tower. Hermione’s stomach churned and bile rose in her throat as Bellatrix Lestrange’s blood-chilling cackle echoed across the grounds. The Death Eaters on the lawn laughed and cheered, taking off back towards the castle.

Hermione’s stomach gave an unpleasant lurch. She turned and retched into a bush. Someone had just been murdered before her very eyes. She was too far away to see who it was and she couldn’t risk being found to go and see.

A moment later, a small sea of hooded figures ran from the castle and headed in her direction.

Heart pounding wildly, she turned and ran as swiftly as she could through the trees. She jumped over downed trees and ducked under branches in search of a hiding place. With a jolt, she remembered her D.A. coin. She could signal the others and tell them where she was. She reached into her pocket and her heart sank. The coin wasn’t there. In its place was a hole. She must have ripped a hole in her pocket when she climbed out the window.

“FIGHT BACK, YOU COWARD!”

Hermione wheeled around. It was Harry. She couldn’t see him, but his anguished shouts echoed through the trees. He was back, which meant that Dumbledore had returned to Hogwarts. Relief washed over her. Dumbledore was back. They were saved.

“Find the boy!” A Death Eater shouted. “The Dark Lord will want to punish him.”
They were close. Hermione ran deeper into the forest hoping against hope that werewolves would be the worst she encountered tonight.

As she darted past a tree, she collided with something tall and alive. A small scream of surprise escaped her throat before the person clapped his hand over her mouth. In the dim moonlight she could barely make out his pointed features, his platinum hair, and his frightened eyes. Draco Malfoy stood before her, his eyes wild with terror, listening intently to the forest.

She couldn’t scream for fear that other, more frightening Death Eaters would hear.

“Help me, Granger.” Draco breathed in her ear.

Then the realization dawned on her that Malfoy meant her no harm.

“Please.” He added.

She looked into his frightened eyes and considered running and leaving him to be found and killed, or worse.

“If they find us we’re both dead, Granger.”

He was right, and as much as she loathed him, he’d be helpful to have around if they were found.

“Over here!” A voice sounded from nearby. A twig snapped from the other direction. They were closing in.

Draco looked down at her, his eyes pleading. She couldn’t condemn him to death no matter how foul he was. She grabbed his hand and dashed deeper into the forest, Draco Malfoy at her side holding fast to her hand.

They darted through the gnarled trees together. The moonlight barely lit their path but they didn’t dare light their wands. They could hear footsteps chasing them. How many were there? Two? Three? More than that? How many could they handle if they were caught? Would they be killed immediately if discovered? Or would they be taken to Voldemort to be questioned, tortured, or worse?

They stopped and crouched behind a fallen tree to listen. For a fleeting moment, Hermione thought they’d lost them. Then she realized she could hear Draco’s labored breath beside her and someone else’s. Not her own, but the rattling breath of a third party. Draco must have heard it too, for he stiffened beside her, holding tighter to her hand. They turned to see the mad eyes of McNair. Without missing a beat Draco silenced him as Hermione stunned him. McNair fell to the ground with a low thud. Hermione looked down in shock. Draco pulled her hand, bringing her out of her stupor and they began running through the trees once more.

The trees got thicker and soon the sounds of chaos at the castle were completely muffled. They were frighteningly alone. All Hermione could hear was her own heart pounding wildly in her chest and Draco’s shallow breathing next to her.

For hours it seemed, neither of them spoke or moved. They stood, hand in hand, ears listening acutely for any sound of movement. None came.

“We’ve got to get back to the castle,” Hermione said finally, her voice cutting through the darkness like a knife.

“We can’t,” Draco choked out, his voice hollow.
“But Dumbledore will have dispensed of the Death Eaters by now. It should be safe.”

It was eerily silent for a moment. “Dumbledore’s dead.”

Hermione’s stomach dropped, her insides felt like they’d been doused with ice water. “He can’t be,” she breathed.

“He is. I…I saw it happen.”

A horrible wave of realization and terror washed over her. Her head was spinning and she felt like she was going to be sick again. “Who?” she choked out when she found her voice again.

“Snape.” He sounded far away, though he still held tight to her trembling hand. “But it was supposed to be me. I couldn’t do it. That’s why…” he trailed off.

“That’s why they’re looking for you,” she finished.

“So we can’t go back, you see.”

Hermione’s mind raced back to Hogwarts. “But what about Harry and Ron? All the students?” She thought of Harry fighting all those Death Eaters single-handedly. She thought of Ron, locked in battle with Bellatrix Lestrange. Were they okay? Were they even still alive?

“It’s too dangerous,” said Draco with finality. “No, Granger. From now on they’re on their own. Just like us.”
They ran all night. They passed beyond the once protected boundary of Hogwarts without incident, reminding Hermione with a pang of grief that the one who had cast all those spells was gone. They walked so long that the trees around them began to get thinner. They were almost out of the forest.

When they reached a clearing large enough to set up camp, they began to gather things around them to make a rough shelter held together by magic. Hermione ducked low and crawled into the makeshift tent. Her sleeve caught on a loose twig and tore, and with that Hermione finally broke down.

The full impact of everything that had happened hit her hard. She sobbed. For Dumbledore, for Harry, for Ron, for all she’d left behind, and for all she’d probably never see again. She cried for hours, until the sun began to peak over the horizon. Malfoy let her cry uninterrupted, which, Hermione thought, was probably the most decent thing he’d ever done for her.

He didn’t ridicule her for being weak. He didn’t tell her to get some sleep. He didn’t tell her they had to go when the sun rose. He merely sat next to her, lost in his own thoughts, she supposed. And she wouldn’t have been surprised if he had shed a few tears too.

They tore down their makeshift tent and left no trace of their stay. They then continued their way out of the forest. They walked across the rolling hillsides of Britain feeling frightfully exposed.

They both knew that his fellow Death Eaters will have found McNair by now and told them that Malfoy and Hermione were together. They should have ‘Obliviated’ him, Hermione thought bitterly.

“Are you quite sure we can’t go back to Hogwarts? Even with Dumbledore…I’m sure the other teachers and the Order have retaken the school.” Hermione said as they trudged through the tall grass of a field.

“Maybe,” admitted Draco, “we can’t be sure though. If they didn’t, the Death Eaters will have set up watch points to look for people trying to escape and they’ll have put the whole castle on lockdown. Besides, there’s the Dark Lord to fear now. With Dumbledore gone, there’s nothing to stop him from taking over the school.”

Something heavy settled in Hermione’s stomach. What chance did Harry have now that Dumbledore was dead? And if Harry fell, what chance did any of them have?

Harry and Ginny sat beside Ron in a cave in the hills above Hogwarts. Ron’s wounds were healing quickly thanks to Madame Pomfrey’s excellent care. There was still no sign of Hermione, and at this point, Harry thought with a heavy heart, he had no hope that there ever would be. There was no doubt in his mind that Hermione would have found him as quickly as she could if she were able.

Dead or captured? It made little difference at this point. All roads led to Voldemort now. Snape had taken over the school, the Death Eaters by his side. Harry, Ron, and Ginny had fled to the hills near Hogwarts and set up a very temporary Order Headquarters there. It would not hold for long, but it would suit fine while they were trying to recover from their physical and emotional losses.
He quickly wiped his eyes as McGonagall stooped low to enter the cave. “Any sign of her?” He asked, with little hope.

McGonagall looked down and shook her head. “She’s certainly not in the castle. Rubeus, Filius, and I have checked a large part of the grounds, but if she’s in the forest it might take us days to find her…” She couldn’t bring herself to say ‘her body.’

“Could they have taken her?” Ginny asked, “The Death Eaters?”

“It’s possible. Though I don’t see why they would have. I suppose they know she’s your friend, Mr. Potter. They may have wanted to question her.”

Harry was struck with a horrible pang of guilt. He couldn’t bear to think of Hermione locked up somewhere, defenseless, and tortured because of him. How many people now had been hurt or killed because of him? His parents, Cedric Diggory, Sirius, Dumbledore, and now Hermione.

He stood abruptly and walked to the mouth of the cave to hide the tears that were threatening at the corners of his eyes. After a moment he felt a gentle hand in his and turned to see Ginny giving him a very understanding look. She placed her other hand on the side of his face and rested her forehead against his. “This is not your doing.” She whispered so only he could hear, “You can’t blame yourself for this, Harry. And worrying about her isn’t going to do anything to help.”

Harry closed his eyes and nodded, giving her hand a quick squeeze before turning back to McGonagall. “Is there anything we can do?”

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“We’re going to need to get some supplies.” Draco said after an hour or so of walking.

“Where are we going to…?”

“We’ll have to disguise ourselves and go to Diagon Alley.” He said thoughtfully.

“Wouldn’t it be safer to get muggle supplies?”

“Maybe so, but we’ll last longer with the magical things. Besides, it would take us hours to convert the tent and things to make them magical.” He explained.

Hermione nodded, still in shock over their situation. She pulled out her wand and cast transfiguring charms on herself. She changed her hair to blonde, her eyes blue, and altered her facial bone structure a bit. Draco did the same.

“Different enough?” She asked, turning to the now unrecognizable Draco.

He looked at her in a way she’d never seen before, but quickly shook it off. “Definitely.” He said quickly. “Let’s change our clothes too. We’ll draw a lot of attention to ourselves in Hogwarts robes.”

Hermione shook her black school robe off and ripped off the Hogwarts crest. She used her wand to make a few well-placed cuts to turn it into a short sleeve black dress that would fall about to her knees. She looked at Draco hesitantly, who was regarding her with curiosity. “Could you…er…turn around a minute?” She asked, blushing. When he did she quickly shed her school skirt, blouse, and tie and pulled the dress over her head. “Okay.” She said softly when she was decent.

He turned and took in the sight of her for a moment, turning a very pale shade of pink and clearing his throat. His change was easier. He discarded his Hogwarts robe and tie all together and untucked
his shirt. “Ready?” He asked, holding out his hand.

Hermione took a deep breath before reaching out to hold his hand and apparating to Diagon Alley.

Less than twelve hours since Dumbledore’s death, Diagon Alley was already mostly deserted. The few people who were here doing their shopping were in tight groups and moved quickly from shop to shop. People were cautious before, but the knowledge that there was no one left alive that Voldemort feared left everyone feeling helpless and terrified. What was stopping Voldemort from taking over the whole wizarding world now? Just a Ministry that is weak, struggling for a sense of security, desperate to appear strong.

They got everything they could imagine they might need for a few months on the run as quickly as they could. They tried to act as casual as possible, but they were both jumpy and suspicious of everything. They kept looking over their shoulders and hurried through all the transactions with the store clerks. Hermione would have worried about seeming too skittish, but then she realized that most people were these days.

“Do you happen to have today’s Daily Prophet?” Hermione asked on their way out of the shops.

The shopkeeper looked at her in shock. “There wasn’t one today.” She said.

“There wasn’t? Why not?” Draco asked.

“No one really knows…who’s in charge…anymore.” The clerk said nervously.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, after last night…I’m sure you heard…everyone’s worried that Scrimgeour may not really be the one in control of the ministry.” The clerk explained in a rushed whisper.

“You think he may be under the Imperius curse?” Draco asked quietly.

“Maybe. More likely someone very close to him is. You-Know-Who may not have taken over yet, but if you ask me, it’s only a matter of time. Now you two better get out of here. His watchers are everywhere already.”

“Vold—” Hermione began

“Don’t say it!” The clerk interrupted her, “I heard some big bloke talking about it earlier. They’re putting a taboo on his name to find people who are brave enough to stand up to him and say it. Something about it breaks protective spells and sends them right to you.”

“The Death Eaters?” Hermione asked

“They’re calling them snatchers. The snatchers find you and take you to the death eaters.” The clerk explained. “If you want my advice, get out of the country while you can. I bet it’s only a matter of time before they find a way to close the boarders.”

“Who are they rounding up?” Hermione asked.

“Mostly people who they know are opposing You-Know-Who, but there’s been rumors that they’re snatching muggle-borns too.”

Draco glanced a Hermione quickly, seeing a look of panic cross her face. How long would their spells last? How long would it be before it was obvious that a known Death Eater and a known
muggle-born were on the run together?

“One last thing,” asked Draco, “what’s happening at Hogwarts?”

“Well, I’ve only heard rumors since there was no Prophet today, but a lot of the students were picked up by their parents early this morning. They said its overrun with Death Eaters. Laying low so the Ministry doesn’t interfere, but they’re there.”

“What about the Potter boy?” Draco asked.

“They haven’t seen him. I bet he ran for it after Dumbledore…well, you know.”

“Thanks. We’d better go.” Hermione said to Draco hurriedly. He nodded in agreement and they exited the shop and began to make their way toward the Leaky Cauldron.

It didn’t take Hermione any time at all to realize they were being followed. She risked a glance over her shoulder to see three large dark men eyeing her suspiciously. She looked at Draco, the look of terror on his face telling her he had seen them too. They quickened their pace, and a quick glance revealed that the snatchers were gaining.

Draco grabbed Hermione’s hand and took off running through Diagon Alley. The snatchers were hot on their heels. A spell flew past Hermione’s right ear and she screamed. She sent a jinx wildly behind her, not checking to see if she had hit anything. Draco pushed her into an alleyway and spun on the spot, pulling Hermione along with him. Just before they disappeared she saw a snatcher turn the corner and make a lunge for them. She felt his hand graze her hair, but he couldn’t grab hold before they were gone, slamming to earth miles away from Diagon Alley.
Chapter 3: Help

Hermione’s knees gave way and she crumpled to the forest floor, shaking. Draco let go of her hand and began to walk in a large circle around her, casting protective enchantments. Hermione’s mind was reeling with all the information she had just received. The Ministry on the brink of an uprising, Hogwarts under the control of Dumbledore’s murderer, and Harry, Ron and the Order on the run just like she was. Not to mention their recent brush with the snatchers. She slowly got to her feet, reaching into her pocket and pulling out the small beaded back she’d just bought and enlarged magically. She reached inside it and pulled out the tent they’d bought and began to set up camp.

After they’d set up camp Draco was resting inside the tent and Hermione sat at the mouth of the tent going through the books she’d just bought. She wished she had all of her old ones from school. Not to mention the ones she had at her parents’ home.

Her parents.

Hermione jumped to her feet, sending spell books and wrappings everywhere. “Malfoy,” she said abruptly.

Draco burst from inside the tent, wand at the ready. He looked wildly around the forest as if expecting to see Voldemort himself striding through the trees towards them. “What?” he said irritably when he realized they were safe.

“My parents,” Hermione said shortly.

“What about them?” Draco asked, lowering his wand.

“Well what do you think the Death Eaters are going to do when they realize I’m with you? I have to go to them, get them to a safe place.” Hermione said gathering her belongings and throwing them back into the beaded bag. She hurried into the tent and began to pack up everything in sight.

“Whoa whoa whoa,” Draco began. “You can’t just apparate into your parents’ house and tell them to leave the country.”

“Why not?” Hermione asked angrily.

Draco paused for a moment. “Because the Death Eaters will be expecting you to go there. Trust me, it’ll be the first place they’ll look for you. And…and if they’ve killed them they’ll set up a watch for us in the house.”

“So I’m just supposed to sit in a tent in the woods while my parents are tortured and murdered?” Hermione exclaimed.

“I didn’t say that! But you can’t just go barging into muggle London as a muggle-born and friend of Potter with a rogue Death Eater and expect to live to tell the tale. We need a plan.”

“Then help me.” Hermione growled.

They looked happy, encircled in their blissful ignorance. They sipped their tea and discussed their
jobs and recent political events, unaware that their only daughter was lurking outside their living room window, masterfully disillusioned against the afternoon sky.

Hermione gazed longingly at the people who had raised her all her life. She wanted nothing more than to run into the house and throw herself into the safety of her mother’s arms and never leave. Draco must have sensed this, for she felt his hand steadily on her shoulder. She nodded, fighting back tears as she slowly raised her wand to the window. She hesitated, taking in the sight of her parents for what she knew may be the last time, and then slowly whispered “Obliviate.”

Mr. and Mrs. Granger did not flinch when the spell hit them, nor did their expressions change much as the memories of their only daughter faded from their minds. They continued to sip their tea pleasantly. Hermione finished her modifications and lowered her wand. She watched as her father slowly looked at her mother and said, “I think we should go to Australia. We’ve always wanted to. What’s stopping us?”

Hermione smiled weakly, knowing that her parents would be safe now. She looked through the window one last time, trying to memorize her parents’ faces as they talked excitedly about their upcoming adventure. Her heart gave a painful lurch as she tore her eyes away from the house and looked at Draco, wiping a tear away from her eye. She nodded quickly. He nodded too, took hold of her hand and turned on the spot, pulling Hermione away from her home and family.

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“Where do you think Potter is?” Draco asked, his voice cutting across the silence of the tent. Neither of them had spoken since Hermione had modified her parents’ memories. They had set up camp in silence and Hermione had been crying on and off all afternoon. His voice took Hermione off guard and she looked up from her books with surprise.

“I don’t know. Probably on the run like we are. Ron’s probably with him. They’ve probably started looking for the Ho—” She stopped herself.

“Looking for what?” Draco asked.

“A way to defeat Vol—I mean, You-Know-Who.”

Draco looked at her suspiciously but didn’t press the matter. “Wouldn’t they be safer just staying with your Order people?”

“Probably.” Hermione admitted. “But Harry’s always known this is something he has to do on his own. He won’t hide behind the Order. The only reason Ron’s with him is because Ron’s too stubborn to let Harry be completely on his own. I’d be with him too if…well if I could.” Hermione said guiltily.

Draco’s eyes dropped to the floor. “I’m sorry. I never meant for you to get dragged into this with me. I hoped your people would retake the school and you could go back today.”

Hermione stood and brushed her hands off on her pants, grabbed her wand and walked towards the kitchen area of the tent. “It doesn’t matter. Either way I’d be in the woods on the run from Death Eaters.” She started to make dinner with the little food they’d gotten earlier.

“At least if you were with Potter you’d be with friends.”

“It’s over.” She said, “We can’t very well change what happened. And stop calling the Order ‘my people.’ I’ve got news for you, Malfoy. The minute you deserted the Death Eaters the Order became your people too.”

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Draco nodded, the reality of his loyalties sinking in. Hermione knew it was hard for him to accept that deserting the Death Eaters meant supporting Harry and the Order. “Is there anything we can do to help them?” He asked after a moment.

Hermione thought for a moment. Was there? Could they help Harry without being with him? Perhaps they could search for Horcruxes? No, she didn’t know where they were, what they were, or how to destroy them. She also didn’t know if Harry had even successfully obtained the one he and Dumbledore set out to get last night. She was afraid to try to contact any of the Order in case their message was intercepted. It seemed like they were truly alone for the time being. As helpless as she felt, she knew that attempting to take action now would be more reckless than helpful.

“I don’t know.”
Chapter 4: Tension

For weeks they were on the run together, never staying in the same place for more than a few nights. They took turns disguising themselves and going to the nearest muggle town to get food and attempt to nick a few papers. They tried their hardest not to fight, but years of antagonism were not easily dismissed. Most of their arguing sprang from the fact that Hermione was constantly immersing herself in her books in search of anything that could shed some light on Horcruxes. Draco repeatedly asked her what she was up to only to receive vague, unilluminating answers in return.

“I thought you said there was nothing we could do to help right now!” Draco shouted one hot July day.

“There’s not!” Hermione countered, slamming her book shut and throwing him a scornful look.

“Then why do you constantly have your nose in a book? What are you looking for? What could possibly be so important?”

“I’m not allowed to read? Why does it surprise you that I’m always reading? You always said I’m a know-it-all anyways!”

“If there’s something we can do to help just tell me! You know I hate being cooped up here in this fucking tent with nothing to do but wait for you-know-who to come find me!”

“There’s not. I just like reading.” Hermione lied dismissively.

“Fine,” Draco growled, “then tell me what you’re reading.”

“What?”

“If it’s nothing to do with Potter or You-Know-Who then just tell me what you’re reading. Surely it’s not a secret if you’re just reading for pleasure.”

“I…I can’t.”

“I knew it! It is something to do with Potter!”

“I can’t tell you, Malfoy so just drop it!”

“What could possibly be so important to keep a secret that you can’t tell me? Obviously I’m not about to go run off and tell the Death Eaters, so what’s the problem?”

“It’s not my secret to tell! Harry was only allowed to tell Ron and me. Besides the three of us only Dumbledore knew. So it’s not like all Order members know this big secret, its just us.”

“And what do you think you’re going to do when you have an amazing epiphany? Send an owl to Potter? Or will you try to handle it on your own? Perhaps you’ll bring me along but not tell me anything about it. News flash, Granger, we’re fucking alone out here. You can’t tell anyone about the stuff you find without being found by the wrong people. So you might as well start trusting me.”

“If I find anything illuminating I might shed some light in your direction, but for now it’s a secret, Malfoy. So drop it!” She grabbed her book and stormed out of the tent. Bloody irritating ferret, she thought savagely. He wanted her to trust him? Just like that? Not bloody likely. She flopped down
on a rock a few metres from the tent and began to read again, her eyes skimming over the words without really taking them in.

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July was ending quicker than Hermione had hoped, and still they had very little word from the wizarding world. Only an occasional Daily Prophet when they could nick it and what one of them might overhear while getting food while disguised. On the first of August Draco entered the tent after a quick trip to Diagon Alley for food.

“I have bad news and worse news.” He said dropping a bag of potatoes on the table and reaching into his robes for a paper.

“The bad news is Snape’s been made Headmaster of Hogwarts.” Draco announced.

“What?” Hermione gasped nearly dropping the knife she was using to cut up carrots.

“It gets worse, much worse.” He said unfurling the Daily Prophet

RUFUS SCRIMGEOUR MURDERED. PIUS THICKNESSE NEW MINISTER OF MAGIC

This time Hermione did drop the knife, which stuck into the floor of the tent as she gaped at the headline. “Pius Thicknesse, the…”

“Death Eater, yes. Well, he’s under the Imperius curse, but at this point it doesn’t matter. The Dark Lord is pulling the strings either way.”

“Well, I suppose we knew it was only a matter of time. I guess we’re lucky it lasted this long.” Hermione said solemnly setting the paper down gently on the table. She bent down and picked up the knife, casting a quick cleansing spell before turning back to the table with a heavy heart.

Draco kicked off his boots and flopped into a chair. “Let me know when dinner’s ready will you?” He sighed closing his eyes.

Hermione turned, her hands on her hips. “Yes, I suppose it would be too much to ask for some help.” She spat.

“What?” Draco lifted his head and looked at her, bewildered.

“You know, I’m always the one that does all the cooking around here. It seems like you never even attempt to help out.”

“I could cook!”

“But you don’t! Is it because I’m a woman? Or is it because I’m a muggle-born, as you so frequently love to remind me?”

“You want me to do the cooking? Fine! I’ll do all the fucking cooking and you can risk your ass everyday going into towns and flaunting your Muggle-born self around to get food. You didn’t read that article, did you? They’re rounding all of you up, throwing all the muggle-borns in Azkaban. They don’t even have to hide it now that they’re in power. It’s part of their new regime. But fine, I’ll stay here and cook while you go get yourself arrested.” He shouted.

“And you think it’s safer for you to go get the food? You deserted the Death Eaters! If anything you’re in more danger than I am! But perhaps you’d like to do it all? If I’m not a skilled enough
“Well then what’s the point of even being here with me, Granger?” Draco seethed.

“You know, I’m beginning to wonder that myself. If it weren’t for you, I’d be with Harry and Ron right now. If it weren’t for you, Dumbledore would still be alive. I bet Harry was right and you were the one who cursed Katie and poisoned Ron as well.”

Draco went red and clenched his jaw. “Accidents,” he insisted.

“As if that makes it more forgivable. You were reckless and stupid, and you didn’t care who you hurt to achieve your goal,” Hermione seethed.

“You know I didn’t have a choice.”

“There’s always a choice, Malfoy,” she said darkly.

“Have you forgotten that I chose to leave rather than kill Dumbledore in June? I put myself and my family in danger by doing so.”

“You still let the Death Eaters into the castle. You didn’t put your wand to him, but you’re the reason Dumbledore is dead.”

They stared at each other for several moments, both of them practically shaking in anger. Hermione didn’t think she had ever been so angry. She suddenly couldn’t think of anything except for getting as far away from him as possible.

“I can’t do this anymore. I must have been out of my mind to think you and I could live like this. I can get by just fine on my own. I don’t need some slimy ferret to protect me. If I recall, I did you the favor by saving your ass back in June. I don’t need you.” She began throwing all her belongings into her beaded bag.

“Yeah? Well I sure as hell don’t need you!” Draco yelled.

“Good, because I’m gone, Malfoy!” She said wrenching the flap of the tent open and storming away from him.

“Yeah go!” Draco shouted after her exiting the tent too. “GO! I hope they toss your ass in prison!”

Hermione gasped and turned on him, eyes wild with hatred. “I hope Voldemort kills you himself!” She growled before turning and marching through the trees wanting to get as far away from him as possible.

She stomped through the trees seething. She would go to the Burrow, talk to someone in the Order, and try to find Harry and Ron from there. It wasn’t a very good plan, and she was sure the Burrow was being watched, but it was better than staying with the pompous ferret.

“Well well, what have we here?” Came a low growl from behind her.

Hermione wheeled around, reaching for her wand as she saw three snatchers standing nearby.

“Expelliarmus!” One of them shouted before she could defend herself. “So you are a witch. But why on the run? Mudblood perhaps?” He was circling Hermione closely, touching her hair, and inhaling her scent. Hermione tried to recoil but the other two held her in place. “What’s your name, love?”

Hermione’s mind reeled. If she told them her real name they’d take her to the Ministry and then to
Azkaban. They would also know she was a friend of Harry’s, and if they figured that out she’d be lucky to avoid being taken to Voldemort. “Ginny Weasley,” she lied quickly.

“No she isn’t.” One of the other snatchers said. “All the Weasley’s got ginger hair. Every one knows that.”

’Smarter than I thought,’ Hermione thought with a mental kick.

“Why don’t you want us to know who you are, beautiful?”

Hermione didn’t answer. She couldn’t focus with him so close to her, and even if she could, she couldn’t think of how to get out of this. It was three against one and she didn’t have her wand.

“Well what shall we do with you? How about a nice trip to the Ministry?”

Suddenly a jet of red light hit the head snatcher square in the chest and he toppled to the forest floor. The two holding her loosened their grips in confusion and Hermione took her opportunity. She threw her head back into the nose of the snatcher holding her from behind, hitting him squarely in the nose. With a groan he released her and stumbled back before a stunning spell hit him as well. The third snatcher still had hold of her arm, but she brought back her other one and launched her fist into his nose before turning to see her savior.

Draco stood before her, chest heaving from running, wand held aloft. She looked back down at the snatcher she’d punched. She’d managed to knock him out, which she felt rather proud of, despite the blinding pain in the back of her head and her hand. She walked over to the snatcher who had taken her wand and retrieved it.

“How did you know?” she asked.

“You said You-Know-Who’s name. I realized it right after you left,” Draco explained sharply.

Hermione’s heart thudded in her chest. She hadn’t even realized she’d said it. “Why did you come after me? I thought you wanted me in jail,” she pointed out.

Draco’s jaw clenched, “yeah, well do you really want You-Know-Who to kill me?”

Hermione didn’t reply. Obviously she didn’t want Malfoy to be killed, she’d just been so angry. She’d wanted to hurt him as much as possible. Ignoring the uncomfortable moment blossoming between them, she turned back to the three unconscious snatchers. “Should we take their wands?” she asked bitterly.

“No, but I think we should wipe their memories.” Draco said moving closer to her. They took a few moments to obliviate them and then they returned to the campsite to pack up and move to a new location.

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They sat in their tent again, the unspoken words hanging in the air between them as they finished an unfulfilling dinner of chicken and rice soup.

“Thank you,” Hermione said finally, “for saving me earlier. I didn’t deserve it after…”

“You’re welcome.” Draco interrupted her stiffly. “Listen, Granger—I—I’m sorry about earlier.”

“Me too,” Hermione nodded, “It was a stupid argument, and it would be foolish of us to try to make
it on our own like this. And I know we don’t get along at all, but we need to at least try to be civil to one another if we’re going to survive.”

Draco nodded, “Agreed. And if you need help with something all you have to do is ask instead of jumping down my throat and accusing me of being prejudiced.”

Hermione smiled weakly. “Sorry. I just feel quite trapped here with you.”

“I know. And believe me, I’d rather be with just about anyone else, but we’ll never make it if we can’t learn to compromise. We don’t have to like each other, but we have to try to be civil.” He extended his hand to her.

Hermione looked back at him for a moment before grasping his hand firmly and giving him a slight smile. It wasn’t much, but it was progress.
Uncertainty

Chapter 5: Uncertainty

Day after day, week after week dragged on, and Hermione and Draco were still alone together in the wilderness. Hermione had lost track of the days. She recalled vaguely wondering one night as she and Draco tried to go to sleep, if it might be September first. She mused about what her life would be like right now if Dumbledore hadn’t been killed and if Voldemort hadn’t taken over the Ministry. She would have gone back to Hogwarts. She would have sat with her two best friends on the Hogwarts express and eaten sweets from the trolley. She couldn’t recall the taste of sweets, nor the face or name of the woman who sold them. She couldn’t remember the feel of a warm hug from her friends. With a painful lurch, she realized that she wasn’t even sure if they were alive.

They had heard no news of anyone in the Order or of Harry and Ron who, Hermione was certain, if they were alive, were likely in a similar situation as she and Draco. She suspected that Harry, at least, was still alive. She felt certain that they would know if Voldemort had killed him. That didn’t mean that Ron was alive though. Without Ron, the wizarding world might not be so very different. Everything would keep spinning as usual. But not for Hermione.

The thought of losing Ron brought tears swiftly to her eyes. She may never again look into his kind, blue eyes, or have a pointless argument with him, or receive one of his warm, tight hugs. She cried softly.

She heard Draco turn over in his bunk and she opened her eyes to see him lean up a bit and look over at her.

“Hey, are…” he began.

But Hermione just turned over in her bed and cried herself to sleep, uncaring that he knew she was crying.

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The following morning, Hermione woke up before Draco. She was still feeling miserable as she made up her bunk and took a few steps over to their kitchen area. She ate a quick and boring breakfast, before opening a book. She tried to push her melancholy down, but she still felt a darkness hovering over her like a Dementor looming nearby.

The thought of Dementors gave her an idea. She pulled out her wand and conjured a patronus. It took her a few tries, as happy memories were in short supply these days, but she was finally able to produce a small otter. It burst from her wand and ran in a happy circle around the tent before settling at her feet.

Its effects were immediate and she found she felt better. The weight that had settled in her heart over the past couple of months seemed to have lifted.

“What the hell is that?”

Hermione jumped at Draco’s voice, and her Patronus flickered, but did not disappear.

“It’s my Patronus,” she explained shortly, turning back to her book.

“There aren’t any Dementors here, why did you conjure it?” he asked, pushing himself off of his
bunk to walk hesitantly over to the table. The silver otter lifted its head as he approached, but didn’t waste much interest on him.

“It fends off negative energy and feelings. I was a little down, so I thought it might help,” she explained.

“I could have used one of those last year,” Draco said glibly.

“What’s your Patronus form?” she asked conversationally.

“I don’t know,” he replied sharply, filling the kettle with water and lighting a fire under it with his wand.

“You’ve never produced a corporeal Patronus before?” she asked in surprise.

He went a bit stiff, a pink blush working its way up his neck. “No.”

Hermione paused, reading his body language easily after their months together. “Have you ever produced a Patronus?” she asked hesitantly.

Draco busied himself with picking at his fingernails and she knew that meant ‘No.’

Hermione looked down at the otter at her feet. Draco was a capable wizard; she saw no reason why he would be unable to produce a Patronus. “I could teach you, if you want,” she offered timidly.

Draco scoffed, “As if I need you to teach me spells.” He cast her a withering look before stalking back over to his bunk. He sank down onto it and hung his head in his hands.

The silver otter, sensing his misery, stood up and glided over to him. It climbed onto his lap and nuzzled his face. Draco jumped in surprise, surveying the otter with curiosity. After a moment, he relaxed and the otter curled up on his lap and lay down. A small smile graced Draco’s lips for a brief moment, but he quickly fell back into his usual indifference.

He cleared his throat and looked up at her. “Fine. You can teach me,” he said sternly, “for safety. If we come across some Dementors, I’ll need to know how to do it, I guess.”

“Yeah, of course,” Hermione replied, fighting the urge to smile.

The kettle began to wail and Draco stood to retrieve it, the silver otter jumping off of his lap and making another lap around the tent. Draco poured the tea for himself and Hermione and handed her a mug.

“Thanks,” she mumbled, watching him carefully.

“So how do you do this Patronus thing?” he asked, sitting across from her.

Hermione closed her book and slid it away from her so that she wouldn’t be distracted. “You need to think of something that makes you happy. Not just something you like, but a memory. Try thinking of the happiest moment of your life,” she explained with a small smile.

Draco furrowed his brow in thought. He looked at the wand in his hand. After a moment of thought he nodded, “alright.”

“Got a memory?” she asked. He nodded, so she continued. She demonstrated the wand movement necessary, a simple swoop and slash motion that he mastered easily. “Good. The only other thing to do is think about that memory and say the words ‘Expecto Patronum.’”
“Expecto Patronum,” he repeated hesitantly. She nodded. He took a sip of his tea before standing up and squaring his shoulders. He closed his eyes for a moment before proudly saying “Expecto Patronum” and flourishing his wand.

Nothing happened.

He stood dumbly for a moment, a pale pink blush rising up his neck. He cleared his throat before trying again.

Again, nothing happened. No Patronus, not even the slightest hint of silver mist.

He huffed and threw his arms up in frustration.

“It’s okay,” Hermione offered gently. “Harry taught me how to do it a couple years ago. It took me ages. It’s a complicated spell.”

Draco just huffed again.

“If you don’t mind me asking, what were you thinking of?” she asked.

He sat back down across from her, looking at his wand as if it had betrayed him. “What do you think of?” he asked.

She had to suppress the urge to snap at him that it was none of his business, or to point out the hypocrisy of asking her when he hadn’t answered. Instead, she took a deep breath and answered him. “It varies. But usually it’s either the moment I got my Hogwarts letter, or the moment that I became friends with Harry and Ron.”

Draco frowned, realizing that his memory hadn’t been strong enough. He wracked his brain for something, anything that made him happy.

“Do you have a memory like that you could think of?” she offered gently. “It could be anything that makes you happy. A memory with your parents, or your friends. Even a dream. It could be anything as long as it makes you happy.”

Draco stood and tried the spell a few more times with no luck, growing increasingly frustrated every time he failed.

“It won’t happen if you get angry with yourself,” Hermione chastised.

“If you were a better teacher maybe I could do it!” he snapped bitterly.

“Don’t blame me just because you don’t have a single happy memory to use!” she bit back savagely.

Draco went red with embarrassment and rage. “I have lots of happy memories,” he seethed.

Hermione shrugged, “it sure doesn’t seem like it.”

“You don’t know anything about my life,” he said darkly, his eyes warning her not to push him.

Hermione was angry now, too angry to remember that they had agreed to be civil to each other. “That may be true, but if your life were really as happy as you claim, then you wouldn’t have so much trouble producing a damn Patronus.”

“Shut up,” he retorted lamely.
“You’re just mad because you just realized that your life has been shit all along.”

“I’m warning you, Granger—“

“You don’t scare me,” Hermione scoffed, rising to challenge him. “You can’t even produce a tiny Patronus.”

“SHUT UP!” he roared. In a flash he was upon her, his hands gripping her arms tightly as she stumbled back into the table. He loomed over her menacingly, his eyes wild with anger. She did her best to maintain her composure, but he saw the brief flicker of fear in her eyes. For a brief moment, he seemed to lean in, his eyes flickering to her lips. It was a tiny motion, one she almost missed, but it was there.

“What the hell are you doing?” she gasped out, leaning away from him as his fingers dug painfully into her triceps.

He blinked and seemed to remember himself. He suddenly released her as if she were on fire. He took two steps away from her and shoved his hands into his pockets. He stood dumbly for a moment, seemingly stuck somewhere between guilt at his outburst, confusion at his actions, and rage at her. He cleared his throat, “thank you, Granger, for pointing out how bitterly unhappy my life has been.”

With one final scathing look at her, he turned on his heel and exited the tent.

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Hermione sat hunched over her books while Draco ventured into a nearby town in search of news and food. It had been three days since their argument over the Patronus. They hadn’t mentioned it at all since he had stormed out of the tent. Her guess was that he was as eager as she was to just ignore it and move on. He hadn’t attempted a Patronus again to her knowledge. His embarrassment at being unable to produce one had put him in a particularly bad mood, even by his standards.

The tent flap opened suddenly and Draco entered grinning. Hermione’s brow furrowed. She couldn’t remember the last time she had seen him grin like that. She wasn’t sure if she had ever seen him grin like that.

“You’re going to love me, Granger,” he declared proudly. He pulled a box from his coat and set it on the table in front of her.

Hermione looked at it and then at him. “What’s this?”

“Open it.” Draco grinned.

When Hermione did she saw a large piece of the most delicious-looking chocolate cake she had ever seen in her life. “I…what…how did you…?” Hermione stuttered. She looked back up at Draco who had just pulled two forks from his pocket and sat down next to her.

“Nicked it from a street bake stand.” He explained proudly, handing her one of the forks.

“I don’t even care that you stole it. I could kiss you, Draco, honestly.” Hermione smiled before plunging her fork into the cake and taking a bite.

She couldn’t remember when she had eaten anything so delightful. They’d been surviving off of vegetables made into bland stews and the occasional loaf of bread for months now. She couldn’t help letting out a low moan of ecstasy before diving in for another bite.
It took her a moment to realize that Draco wasn’t eating. When she looked over at him quizzically, she found him looking at her with an expression she had never seen from him before. “What?” She asked softly.

He blinked and looked away, finally picking up his fork. “Nothing.” He took a bite and groaned. “Merlin, that’s good. Much better than your cooking, Granger.”

Perhaps it was the joy of eating cake for the first time in months, or maybe it was the fact that this was the first interaction they’d had in several days that wasn’t tense and argumentative, but Hermione laughed. It bubbled up from her throat and over her lips with the same sweetness the cake had going down.

Draco smirked as he took another bite, offering her a sideways glance.

“What?” she said again at his look.

“You should laugh more, Granger.”

Hermione paused, “what do you mean?”

Draco shrugged, “Laughing suits you.”

Hermione blinked. Draco had never paid her a compliment before. His words settled in her stomach, causing a strange fluttering feeling that she couldn’t really identify. Choosing to ignore the feeling, she just cleared her throat. “Yeah, well, I guess there hasn’t been much to laugh at recently.”

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“They’re alive!” Draco exclaimed a few days later as he entered the tent brandishing a copy of the Daily Prophet.

Hermione jumped up from her chair. “Who’s alive?”

“Potter and Weasley.” Draco said, unfurling the paper on the table. “They broke into the Ministry.”

“They what?” Hermione gasped looking down at the headline with awe.

Undesirable No. 1 Ministry Break In

Yesterday morning, it was discovered that Harry Potter and Ronald Weasley had broken into the Ministry of Magic under the disguise of Polyjuice Potion. Preliminary investigations have not shown anything to be stolen or planted, but several Ministry officials were harmed in the attempt to apprehend the criminals and many Muggle-borns under interrogation were illegally released at the hands of Potter. The two escaped the Ministry and there are currently no leads as to their current whereabouts. An investigation continues in search of anything that may have been stolen. The Ministry requires anyone having any information about this event or the possible whereabouts of Potter and Weasley to come forward. (See page 6 for full story)

Hermione grinned. They were alive! She stared at the large picture of Harry trying to fight back tears of relief and sadness.

“Why the hell would they break into the Ministry?” Draco asked.

Hermione thought for a moment. It didn’t make sense. Going anywhere near the Ministry would
“I have a hunch.” Hermione replied, flipping through the pages and skimming the full article.

“Are you ever going to stop keeping secrets from me?” Draco asked, looking over her shoulder.

Hermione finished reading the article and turned to face him. She searched his face for a moment and then nodded. “Sit down.” She ordered softly, moving to sit at the table.

“Don’t tell me what to do,” Draco retorted automatically.

Hermione sighed in frustration. “If you would quit being difficult for five minutes, I’m trying to be honest with you,” she snapped.

Draco sat across from her and watched her patiently.

“Dumbledore, before he died, told Harry a crucial detail about You-Know-Who and how to kill him. Harry told Ron and me so that we might be able to help.” Hermione began.

“What detail?” Draco asked.

“You-Know-Who created things, objects that basically make him impossible to kill unless these things are destroyed. He made six of them and hid them, and it’s up to Harry to find them and destroy them. Otherwise he won’t be able to kill You-Know-Who.”

Draco’s brow furrowed, “how can someone create things to make themselves immortal?” He asked.

“They’re called Horcruxes. I don’t know much about how exactly they’re made, and frankly I don’t want to. But the gist of it is that he split his soul and the piece of his soul would be concealed in an object of his choosing.” Hermione explained.

“So there’s six bits of The Dark Lord just laying about somewhere in the world?” Draco asked in horror.

“Well not anymore. Two of them are already destroyed. Harry destroyed one entirely by accident in his second year without realizing what it was, and Dumbledore destroyed another one last year.”

“Okay so four bits of him somewhere.” Draco exasperated, “and Dumbledore thought this task was best left to a seventeen-year-old wizard? Why doesn’t he have the entire Order bunch working on it?”

“Well he was trying to look for them on his own too, but he had to tell Harry. Harry’s the one who has to kill You-Know-Who eventually, so its only right that he know what he’s really up against. Dumbledore and Harry were actually on a trip to find one the night…well the night that we left Hogwarts.” She fell silent.

They never talked about that night. Not since their fight at least. He knew that she ultimately blamed him for what had happened not only for Dumbledore’s death, but also for their situation. She knew that he never really wanted any of this to happen and that becoming a Death Eater hadn’t been his decision, but that didn’t stop him from feeling entirely responsible for all of the terrible things that were happening.

“So, did they find one?” Draco asked.

“I don’t know. I never got to ask. Maybe.” Hermione said quietly, trying not to think about the
moments with her best friends that she was robbed of.

“Okay, so You-Know-Who has Horcruxes. Two are destroyed and Potter may or may not have another one. What does any of this have to do with the Ministry?”

“Well my guess is that Harry and Ron somehow found out that there was a Horcrux somewhere at the Ministry, or possibly in the possession of someone who works there. It was incredibly risky of them to try anything like that, and I doubt they found what they were looking for, but that’s my guess.” Hermione explained.

Draco stood and began to pace the tent. He ran his fingers through his hair and shook his head. He cursed under his breath before turning to look at her. “This is what you’ve been researching? What you refused to tell me about?”

“Yes” Hermione said calmly. “Now you see why I didn’t tell you? The less people who know about this the better.”

Draco nodded and continued his pacing for a few more moments. Hermione watched him, giving him time to process the new information. Finally he stopped and looked at her intently. “I want to help.”

~*~*~*~

That night Hermione lay in bed, her mind replaying the events of the day. She had told Draco everything. Part of her still couldn’t believe it. There had been a time in her life, not so long ago at all, that she had scoffed at the idea of trusting Draco with information so important. But now, she didn’t have any doubts about his trustworthiness. It caused a strange feeling within her, trusting him so much.

There was something else too: guilt. It had been festering within her since their argument about the patronus, writhing like a pit of snakes. She felt, given the growing trust and respect between them, that it was time to clear the air.

“Draco?” she muttered into the dark tent. “Are you awake?”

She heard a rustling from his bunk followed by a sigh. “I am now,” he grumbled.

“Sorry,” she whispered.

“It’s fine. What is it?”

“I’m sorry I said you didn’t have any happy memories.”

It was quiet for several seconds. Hermione wondered if he could hear her heart pounding away nervously in her chest. “It’s alright,” he finally answered, clearing his throat. “You were right. I don’t.”

Hermione’s throat tightened. “I still shouldn’t have said it,” she admitted.

“Apology accepted,” he said.

Hermione didn’t reply, but she felt better having gotten her apology out. The snakes had stopped writhing. She closed her eyes to go to sleep.

“I’m sorry for calling you a Mudblood,” he said after several moments of silence.
Hermione opened her eyes; trying to think back to the last time Draco had called her a Mudblood. She couldn’t remember when it had been. She felt certain that he hadn’t said it in months. “When?” she asked.

He paused before saying, “every time I ever said it.”

Hermione sat up slightly, glancing over to the dark silhouette of his body in his bunk. He was lying on his back looking straight up at the ceiling of the tent. There had been no sarcastic or mocking tone in his voice. He seemed genuine. Her heart was beating quickly again, though she couldn’t quite understand why. But it felt real and important. She lay back down on her pillow with a slight smile. “I forgive you.”

And she really did.
Answers

Chapter 6: Answers

“You’re mental,” scoffed Hermione at Draco’s suggestion.

“Yeah, and? I think it’s the only possible way to find some answers. Even if they aren’t there, we can try to figure out some information. You said it’s a safe house for the Order,” said Draco.

“It was, but it’s been compromised. I’m sure it’s been abandoned.”

“We won’t know for sure unless we go there and check,” he pointed out.

“Malfoy, why do you think I haven’t suggested we go there? Snape knew about this place. Obviously he isn’t to be trusted. For all we know You-Know-Who has turned it into his own headquarters.”

“He has the Manor for his headquarters. Trust me, he wouldn’t change that. It’s too valuable and heavily guarded for him to use another place,” informed Draco.

Hermione sighed. “Fine, we’ll check it out. If we get killed then I’m blaming you.” She started packing things up.

Draco laughed, “I expect nothing less. Should we disguise ourselves?”

Hermione shook her head. “There’s no point in wasting our Polyjuice potion. If anyone is there, it won’t matter who they think we are, we’ll be arrested or killed either way. Besides, we’re almost out and it takes so long to brew.”

Packing up their camp took less time every time they did it. They had developed an unspoken routine over their months together. They worked well together now, and setting up and tearing down their camp was like clockwork to them.

“This is insane.” Hermione breathed as she finished packing up their things in the beaded bag.

“I know,” Draco agreed walking over to her.

“You do realize that Snape has almost certainly told You-Know-Who about this and that we’re more than likely going to be captured and killed, right?” Hermione said brusquely.

Draco nodded and held out his hand. “It’s the only lead we’ve got.”

Hermione bit her lip, looking warily at his outstretched hand. He was right. Grimmauld Place was their only hope of finding anything out. She took his hand, and apparated them to London.

Grimmauld Place towered before them tall and dark. They searched for enemies from their hidden spot across the street before rushing toward the ghostly building.

They stepped inside, listening intently to the sounds of the house around them. Suddenly Hermione felt her tongue curl up in her mouth, making her double over and gag. The next moment the sensation was gone and she noticed that the same must have happened to Draco. They exchanged a wary glance before taking a step into the dimly lit house.

It was immediately obvious that something was wrong. The dust on the floor swirled up, taking a
shape they both knew. The figure swooped toward them, ghostly arm held aloft. Hermione screamed and Draco gasped and stumbled backwards, grabbing Hermione’s hand and pulling her back too, forcing himself between the ghostly form and Hermione. Just before the figure reached them, it burst into smoke and disappeared. As her heartbeat returned to normal, Hermione glanced up at Draco, who was still staring horrified at the spot where the dusty figure of Dumbledore had just disappeared.

Hermione gently tugged on his hand, which she was still holding tightly. “Draco,” she whispered softly in an attempt to pull him out of his trance, “it’s okay. Come on.”

Draco blinked and dropped his eyes to the floor. He wrenched his hand out of hers and ran his fingers roughly through his hair before stepping to follow her.

Hermione wondered why she suddenly missed the feeling of his hand in hers.

They moved slowly, listening to the sounds of the house around them. “Homenum revelio” Hermione whispered holding her wand aloft.

Nothing happened.

“They’re not here?” Draco asked.

Hermione shook her head and continued through the house. She wandered into the sitting area. The signs of life were all around her. The lamp next to the couch was lit and there was an impression in the cushion as if someone had very recently sat there. The dust on the coffee table had been brushed off haphazardly and two crumbed plates and empty glasses sat as if breakfast had just been finished.

Draco picked up one of the empty glasses and sniffed it. He wrinkled his nose and set the glass back down. “Orange juice.” He said, “sitting out since yesterday by the smell of it.”

“We’re too late.” Hermione breathed.

“Looks like it.” Draco replied continuing to look over the room. “I wonder why they didn’t come back after they tried to break into the ministry.”

Hermione looked around. There were no clothes or personal supplies lying about. The only signs of life were in the things that had always been there. “Maybe they couldn’t.” She said exiting the living room and heading for the kitchen.

Suddenly there was a clatter from the kitchen door. The two jumped and whipped out their wands. There was more movement from the kitchen. Hermione definitely heard footsteps and whispering. Holding their wands tightly, Hermione and Draco crept up to the door and stopped. They looked at each other and nodded before swinging the door open and rushing in, wands held aloft.

Kreacher, the house elf stood in the kitchen, his eyes wide. He regarded the two intruders with suspicion.

Hermione and Draco lowered their wands. “Kreacher,” Hermione began, “may we ask you a few questions?”

The elf eyed her curiously, his large eyes darting between her and Draco. He gave a curt nod after apparently deciding that the two were no danger to him or his house. “Master Harry often spoke of Miss Hermione and wondered where she was,” said Kreacher. His eyes moved to Draco, “he did not mention that she may be travelling with a mate.”

“Harry and Ron are staying here?” Hermione asked, ignoring Kreacher’s comment.
Kreacher turned back to polishing a silver plate. “No. Master Harry and Mister Weasley left yesterday morning and did not return to see Kreacher in the evening despite telling Kreacher that they would.”

“Do you know why they didn’t come back?” Draco asked.

Kreacher shook his head. “No, but there have been many visitors to the House of Black since that time.”

“What do you mean?”

“Many men have been coming and going from the house since yesterday. They asked Kreacher many questions. Questions about Kreacher’s master. But Kreacher would never tell his master’s secrets, no, Kreacher is a good elf. And so the men searched the House of Black and put the home under guard. Yes, Kreacher is being watched.”

Hermione and Draco exchanged a panicked look. “We have to get out of here, now.” Draco said. He grabbed Hermione’s arm and they headed toward the kitchen door.

“Not so fast,” came a low growl. Suddenly, Yaxley blocked their path, wand fixed on them. His yellow eyes surveyed them with a wild sort of excitement. “Well, well, Draco,” he began with a sneer, “ran off with the Mudblood, did you? And Harry Potter’s friend at that. Tsk tsk, what would your father say? Better yet,” he growled, “what will the Dark Lord say?”

Draco heard Hermione let out a small gasp behind him. He moved himself between Hermione and Yaxley. If they could only get past him and get outside the door they might be able to escape, but it didn’t look likely.

“Shall I call him?” Yaxley grinned.

“He’ll think you have Potter.” Draco said, “Think of how angry he’ll be when you don’t.”

“You’re joking. He wants you nearly as bad as he wants Potter.” Yaxley laughed, “And adding in Potter’s best friend, a mudblood, will be a bonus, I’m sure.”

“No,” Draco snarled, “you can have me if you want, but let her go.”

Yaxley scowled, “You’re protecting her? A Mudblood? Why?”

Draco didn’t answer, for in reality, he didn’t really know. Call it chivalry, but he couldn’t let Hermione fall into the hands of the Dark Lord. “It doesn’t matter, just let her go.”

“I’m afraid I can’t do that Draco, you see, she’s wanted just as much as you are. Even if I didn’t take her to the Dark Lord, I’m sure the Ministry would love to see her. I’m sure you’ve heard about the inquiries for Mudbloods.”

Hermione had heard enough. Throwing herself from behind Draco, she shot a disarming spell at Yaxley. Taken off guard, his wand flew across the kitchen. Draco took Hermione’s cue and fired a stunning spell at him. He dodged it by ducking into the living room, but it gave Hermione and Draco a chance to slip by.

Yaxley caught the back of Hermione’s jacket and pulled her back. “Draco!” She called out as she fell into Yaxley. Draco turned and, forgetting his wand, punched Yaxley squarely in the nose. He grabbed Hermione’s hand and pulled her towards the door, running with all his might. They were nearly to the door when Yaxley launched himself onto Draco, pulling him down with a yell.
Hermione wheeled around to see them struggling. Draco couldn’t get a good enough grip on his wand to hex him and they were thrashing too much for Hermione to get a clear shot.

“Granger, go! Run!” Draco ordered.

Hermione turned and looked at the door of Grimmauld Place. It was right there. Two more steps and she could open it and apparate away to safety. Two more steps and she could leave Draco behind.

“NO!” She shouted before throwing herself back towards the fighting men. “Stupefy!” She yelled when she thought she might have a clear shot.

Yaxley was thrown off Draco, who scrambled to his feet, grabbed Hermione’s hand and ran through the front door of Grimmauld Place, apparating away to safety.
Chapter 7: Changes

As they put up their protective enchantments and set up camp for the night, Hermione began to think about what had just happened at Grimmauld Place. Not about Yaxley nearly capturing them, though that was certainly on her mind, but about Draco.

There had been several moments when he had protected her. Actually protected her by physically putting himself between her and danger. She couldn’t figure out why, and she knew she would drive herself crazy trying to figure it out.

Could it have been mere chivalry? A desire to keep her, a lady, safe from harm? Or was it possible it meant something more? Perhaps he was beginning to care for her. Perhaps he nearly considered her a friend. Perhaps more.

Hermione’s stomach swooped at the thought of Draco having some sort of deeper feelings for her. It was a ridiculous notion. He was a pureblood, a Death Eater, no less. She didn’t really think of him as a Death Eater, although he did have the mark. And she was a muggle born, and Harry Potter’s best friend. Could it ever really be possible for him to hold feelings other than hatred for her? They were destined to be enemies from the start, from the day Hermione was born into a family of muggles, and Draco into a family of pureblood supremacists.

Then they had run away together, saved each other from danger more times than either could count. Did they still hate each other? Try as she might, Hermione couldn’t tell herself that she hated him anymore. She didn’t know quite what to make of her feelings. She definitely trusted him, or else she never would have told him about the horcruxes. She couldn’t really call him her friend, at least not in the way that she considered Harry and Ron her friends; so why did her heart flutter annoyingly every time she thought about how Draco had protected her, held her hand, and saved her life?

She didn’t know what to say to him, how to thank him for saving her yet again, how to ask why he had protected her so. They prepared the camp in silence, the unspoken words between them hanging like the dark clouds that were rolling over the sky above them.

Hermione set down an apple and a glass of water on their tiny table in front of Draco’s usual spot. He walked over, and before she could talk herself out of it, she stood on tiptoe and placed a small kiss of gratitude on his cheek. She took her apple and water outside to sit watch, leaving Draco inside the tent, stunned.

She sat just outside the tent, trying not to think about Draco. These feelings had crept in so slowly, she hadn’t noticed until they were practically clawing at her mind and pounding at the inside of her heart, screaming for release. She wiped a tear away in frustration. Things with Ron had just begun to pick up before Dumbledore’s death, and now…well, she felt so distant from Ron that she could hardly think of him that way anymore. Distant not just geographically, but in her heart.

Ron. Kind, gentle, caring Ron. Loyal, albeit quite tactless and thoughtless at times. Hermione’s heart ached with the thought of him.

Draco. Mysterious, guarded, occasionally very ill tempered Draco. They argued almost daily, but he seemed to care for her on some level. She thought of how he held her hand when they apparated, or how he would gently shake her awake some mornings, and her heart fluttered.
She sighed. They were so very different, Ron and Draco, and yet Hermione found herself inexplicably and amazingly attracted to both of them. Or at least, she had been attracted to Ron. She wasn’t so sure anymore.

She heard the first drops of rain hit all around her and soon rain was pouring from the black sky overhead. Hermione stood and walked back into the tent, shaking the water from her hair. When she looked up she saw Draco standing near his bed, removing his shirt.

Heat rose to Hermione’s cheeks immediately. This was not the first time she had seen him without a shirt. They’d been living together for months now. But this was the first time she got a really good look at him. He was slender and muscular. She watched his body move as he bent down to retrieve a new shirt from his bed, admiring the way his muscles moved beneath his creamy skin.

Wondering briefly what it might be like to run her hands along those muscles, Hermione felt a tight coil of desire settle in the pit of her stomach. Hermione went and sat on her bed, shaking her head in an attempt to get the image of Draco’s sinewy muscles out of her head.

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Draco lifted his hand to the place where Hermione’s lips had just left him and turned to watch her retreating form as she exited the tent. He let out a breath he didn’t realize he was holding and flopped into his chair, hanging his head in his hands. Why was his heart hammering so wildly in his chest? It was Granger for Merlin’s sake! They’d been enemies since the day they met! Yet after months of only seeing her, he couldn’t deny that he’d begun to look at her differently. One might even say that he’d grown to admire her…perhaps more than admire.

Did he truly have feelings for her? Or was he merely missing the touch of a woman? It had been so long since he had found himself under the warm, healing caress of a woman. But then, it must have been at least as long for Granger, if not longer. Heat rose to his cheeks as he thought of her in such a way and he pulled his fingers through his hair in frustration.

It wasn’t just the fact that he longed for any woman. Certain things she did or said made his heart ache in a way he had never felt before. She trusted him, saw the good in him, and believed in him even when he couldn’t do those things for himself. She saw beyond the Dark Mark to who he truly was. Or at least, who he wanted to be, who he could be.

So, what would happen if he succumbed to his new feelings for her? Rejection from her, possibly. But beyond that there weren’t any other short-term consequences. There wasn’t anyone else to approve of his feelings for her. He didn’t have to face his family or his friends. What harm could it do to indulge just a bit?

Convinced that he was mental, he took a bite of his apple and walked over to his bunk to change into his nightclothes. As he pulled off his shirt, he heard a short intake of breath and realized that Hermione must have re-entered the tent. He reached for a new shirt and pulled it on before turning towards her. She was busying herself with tidying her already spotless bunk. “It’s raining,” she said abruptly and a bit too loudly, only turning slightly from her bunk to glance at him.

Draco smirked, fighting back a laugh at her obvious nervousness. “Yeah,” he said lamely, taking another bite of his apple.

Hermione tucked her hair behind her ear, trying to fight away the flush in her cheeks. “Hey, I…” she started, turning to face him, her hair coming free from her ear again. She stopped abruptly however when she found him standing directly behind her. She let in a sharp breath as their eyes met. There was something different about them; the friendly eyes that had regarded her a moment ago were now
filled with something else. Something much deeper. Uncertainty, admiration, and (could it be?)
desire. The space between them seemed alive with energy, as if it were waiting to be closed and to
encompass them.

“Why did you come back for me?” he asked slowly. “Back at the house, when Yaxley had me. I told
you to run. Why didn’t you just leave?”

She opened her mouth, but hesitated for a moment. “I didn’t want to,” she breathed honestly.

They suddenly seemed close, much too close, their noses mere inches apart. Draco reached up and
tucked a wayward curl behind her ear, his hand settling on her cheek just below her ear. He seemed
to be thinking deeply as he looked down at her. Hermione’s heart was racing and she found it hard to
breathe, as though a heavy weight sat on her chest.

“You could have been free of me,” he remarked.

She could have pointed out to him that she could be free of him at any time. There was nothing
obligating them to stay together. Either of them was free to leave at any time and take their chances
alone. Instead, she took a deep breath and raised her eyes to meet his. “I don’t want to be free of
you.”

There it was, the truth that she was only just realizing herself. Shock registered on his face for a brief
moment, but then a smile settled on his lips. Not a smirk, but a smile. “I don’t want to be free of you
either,” he murmured gently.

And then he was leaning in towards her and, after a brief moment’s hesitation, kissing her. His hand
moved to the nape of her neck, drawing her closer to him. His lips were sticky and sweet with the
residue of the apple he had just finished. Before she knew it, before she could think about what it
meant, she was kissing him back.

He was gentle, surprisingly so, and she found it felt natural to be kissing him. She reached up and
entangled her fingers in his hair as she deepened the kiss, opening her mouth up to him. Their
tongues met, tentatively at first, testing, tasting; and then enthusiastically, desperately seeking
closeness.

He pulled away abruptly, taking a small step back. Her eyes were a little wide, her lips slightly
swollen from their kiss. He was waiting for her to slap him, yell at him, or laugh at him. He couldn’t
decide which of those outcomes would hurt him most.

Hermione took a deep breath, her heart racing. Throwing caution to the wind, she reached up and
wrapped her arms around his neck, standing on her tiptoes to kiss him again.

His hands travelled to her hips as his tongue trailed along her bottom lip. He pulled her closer by the
hips so that her body was flush against his. She released a small moan and he gripped her hips harder
in response. He broke away slightly, resting his forehead against hers. “It’s been so long since I…”
he trailed off to kiss along her jaw line and down her neck.

“I know,” breathed Hermione, tilting her head to grant him access, “me too.”

“Tell me to stop,” he murmured into her hair.

Hermione felt her stomach swoop as his thumb hooked under the bottom of her shirt and slid along
her stomach, making her shiver. “Don’t stop,” she sighed.

He pulled away from her neck, grinning slightly at the quiet noise of protest she made. Slowly, as if
waiting for her to stop him, he lifted her shirt over her head.

She blushed as his eyes wandered her body. He pulled her in and caught her lips again, this time much more ferociously. The passion of his kiss made Hermione whimper. She collapsed to sit onto her bed, pulling him along with her. She reached for his shirt as well. His hand ran from her neck down her shoulder, pushing her bra strap down before reaching around her for the hooks. She leaned back on the bed, grabbing his hand and pulling him down on top of her, his body forcing the air from her lungs in a soft sigh.

His hands began to explore her body. He didn’t need to ask her again if she wanted to stop or if she was sure. At that moment their minds were one, and they needed this. He could feel her heart pounding wildly in her breast. Every breath she took seemed to resonate within him as well. He moved slowly, savoring the feel of her skin, the sight of her pale flesh bathed in the firelight, the curve of her neck. He ran one hand from her neck down her centerline.

She took the opportunity to explore his torso with her hands and eyes. He was thin. Thinner, perhaps, than he had been at Hogwarts due to their shortage of food. But he was muscular still, and Hermione’s eyes feasted on the way his body looked and moved. She wanted to get lost in this moment with him; lost in his touch; forget about the war and the danger they were in.

Her hands travelled south, tugging at his belt buckle and pushing his jeans down over his hips. He broke away from his fiery assault on her neck and looked at her as if he had only just realized how far this was about to go. The blazing, determined look in her eye was all he needed. He quickly kicked his trousers off before pushing her jeans down her legs.

Impatience overtook Hermione as she reached out and pulled his boxers down, blushing not only at his excitement before her, but also at her own boldness. He tugged her panties off as well, unembarrassed by his own nakedness.

His mouth returned to hers as his hand travelled down her body to the part of her that ached for him. She gasped out as his fingers brushed against her. She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him hard, releasing a little moan into his mouth. Her back arched as she raked her fingernails across the back of his neck. She was sure she had never felt passion like this. She couldn’t control her gasps and moans and her heart was pounding so loudly that she was certain that anyone who might pass by would hear it despite their protective spells.

She could wait no longer. “Please.” She breathed, raising her hips to meet his.

Draco let out a low groan in response to her plea. He needed her as badly as she needed him, so he wasted no more time. He kissed her deeply once more and gently slid home. She let out a low moan and ran her fingers down his back as they slowly began to rock together. Their hands and mouths still exploring as they gradually built up speed and ferocity. He was attentive, reading her body’s signals and duplicating things that made her gasp or smile. She returned the favor, getting a particular rush when a swivel of her hips elicited a sudden groan from Draco.

The passion became too much for Hermione first and Draco watched, enthralled as she arched her back and came undone with a gasp, a quiver, and then a smile. He soon followed her over that blissful edge with a grunt.

He rested his forehead against hers, both of them shaking as they slowly came down from their high. He caught her lips for one final kiss before rolling off her, still cradling her in his arms.

Hermione smiled contentedly and nestled into him, resting her head next to his, their noses almost touching as they looked at each other anew.
Draco gently brushed her hair away from her face, his hands still gently roaming over her neck, shoulders and back and he held her in his arms. He watched as her eyelids began to flutter and she was soon asleep. And he soon followed, the warmth of her arms and the sound of the rain lulling him to sleep.

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Hermione woke up several hours later with the memories of the previous evening playing through her mind. Her stomach fluttered and she rolled over with a smile. She reached out her arm for Draco but found only empty sheets. She opened her eyes, noticing that it was still quite dark out. She looked around the tent to find Draco sitting at the dining table with his head in his hands. A candle was lit and a book sat open in front of him, but he didn’t seem to be reading.

“Hey,” she mumbled, sitting up and pulling the sheet around her naked form.

He looked up at her and she saw a range of emotions flash across his face. Happiness, confusion, and, she hoped she was wrong, but regret too. “Hey, are you alright?” He wouldn’t make eye contact with her, but he stood from the table to walk back over to her, blowing out the candle as he did. He sat on the edge of the bed. He looked extremely conflicted, torn somewhere between kissing her and flogging himself.

“Fine, thanks. How are you?” She asked hesitantly.

He nodded and shrugged. “I’m alright.”

She looked down timidly. Here it was. The fall out. Everything she had feared since the first time her heart had fluttered because of him. Rejection because of her blood status. “You regret last night, don’t you?”

“No!” Draco insisted at once. He reached out and took her hand that wasn’t holding the sheet up. “I don’t, honestly.”

“It just looks like something is bothering you,” she commented carefully.

“I’m just a little freaked out that I don’t regret it, to be honest.” He looked down at their joined hands. “You’re very confusing, you know.”

“Confusing?” Hermione repeated, raising an eyebrow.

He nodded, the slightest hint of a smirk playing at his lips. “And a little infuriating.”

Hermione frowned, finally understanding his conflict. “I’m the same person I’ve always been, Draco,” she insisted firmly.

“I know that,” Draco intoned. “It just isn’t who I thought you were.”

“I’m sorry,” began Hermione sharply, pulling her hand from his, “are you upset because I’m not living up to all of the insane stereotypes you were taught about muggleborns?”

“No,” Draco grumbled, but Hermione looked at him skeptically and he turned slightly pink. “I’m mad because I now know those things were never true to begin with.”

Hermione just blinked. She was torn between yelling at him for being so stupid as to believe those things in the first place, and being pleased that he had finally seen the light.
“I’ve been told all these things all my life, Granger. I always knew that you weren’t stupid or weak, but I guess I still felt superior to you…though I can’t imagine now why I once felt that way. You are… wonderful. I feel like a fool for taking so long to notice.”

Hermione smiled slightly, “you are a fool.” Draco looked at her in shock and she grinned at him. “But then again, I’ve always known that.”

He smiled, but she could see him begin to recoil. She reached out and grabbed his hand. “But I was rather blind as well to not see the softer sides of you.”

“That’s because I refused to show my softer sides. I couldn’t,” he said.

“I know that. But they’re there. You’re kind and brave and surprisingly chivalrous for a boy who once made my front teeth grow past my knees.”

Draco laughed, “I forgot about that.” He reached for her face, running his thumb gently across her bottom lip, examining her teeth as she grinned at him. “Sorry.”

Hermione just shrugged. “It worked out for the best. I actually had Madame Pomfrey make them a little smaller than they had been when she shrank them back.”

“Ah, then you’re welcome.” Draco smirked.

Hermione laughed and pushed him away playfully. He laughed with her and leaned in slightly. “I’m going to kiss you now, Granger.”

Hermione’s stomach swooped as he leaned in and captured her lips with his. She kissed him back earnestly, thoughts of his past prejudices far from her mind. He lay back down with her, his hands sneaking underneath the sheet to explore her body. She quickly pushed his pants down over his hips. He chuckled at her eagerness and kicked his pants off before joining her under the covers.

He kissed her slower than he had the previous night, taking his time to draw her close to him and hold her body against his. She wrapped her arms around his neck and buried her fingers in his hair.

“Watch the hair,” he mumbled against her lips with a smirk.

Hermione just laughed and tousled his hair even more. Draco laughed and pulled her hands away, pinning them over her head. “Minx,” he chuckled, dragging his lips down her neck. She moaned and arched her back.

He climbed over her and parted her legs with his knee. He released her wrists to cup her face. She shivered at his tenderness as he captured her lips in a searing kiss. He reached down and pulled her leg up around his waist before gently pushing into her. She purred and rolled her hips against him.

He groaned and bucked forward, eliciting a gasp from Hermione.

He buried his face in her curls and cursed softly. “A man could get used to this, Granger.”

Hermione kissed him deeply before giving him a stern look. “Malfoy, I swear I’ll shave your head if you don’t get on with it.”

With a growl, Draco thrust into her hard. She cried out in pleasure and dug her fingernails into his back. He kept a steady rhythm and she met him each time. He felt her tense up and saw her brow furrow in blissful concentration and he knew she was nearly there. He reached between them to make little circles on her. She gasped out and arched her back, quivering as she came undone around him. With a groan, he followed her over the edge.
“Fuck, you’re perfect,” he murmured into her neck.

A thrill ran through Hermione, though she knew not to place too much stock in what was said immediately after sex. It was hard to think rationally though, when he was still trailing kisses over her neck and face.

He rolled off of her and settled behind her, pulling her against him. Hermione smiled at the feeling of fitting so nicely against his body. Her heart was fluttering in a way that she suspected had little to do with their physical exertions.
Forgiveness

Chapter 8: Forgiveness

There were birds chirping outside the tent as Hermione stirred. Slowly she recalled that she was not alone in her bed. A foreign, musky, intoxicating scent invaded her senses and she leaned towards it. It was then that she became aware of something very warm and solid cradling her. There were muscular arms wrapped around her, her head lay upon a hard chest, and there was a faint hint of steady breath on her face.

She opened her eyes to see the pearly white skin of a man and the memories of the previous night’s events flooded back to her. She vividly remembered his fevered touches, his passionate kisses, and the weight of his body on hers as he…

She felt herself blush at the memory and she shifted to gaze up at Draco. His eyes lay softly closed, and his breath was still steady in slumber. She took the opportunity to let her eyes roam his body, something she hadn’t found the time to do in detail last night.

In the early morning light she could see all of his beauty along with all of his flaws. Stark against the well-defined muscles of his chest and abs was a long and jagged scar, which stretched from his right hipbone nearly to his heart.

With a pang she realized it must be Harry’s doing. She felt a rush of anger towards Harry for his foolishness.

Running her hands over his chest and down his arm she stopped at another scar. Unlike the jagged, uneven scar than ran across his chest, this one was rounded, with smooth edges. Her breath caught in her chest as she realized what it was. The Dark Mark burned dark on his fair skin. She had never seen one up close before. She examined it with almost childlike curiosity, letting her fingers stray close enough to graze the edges but never fully touch it.

She recalled the first time she had seen his mark. It had been July, and a very hot day. She doubted he even knew she’d seen it then. He had wandered away from their camp to a little stream near by. He had stripped down to his pants and taken a dip. Hermione had followed him, wondering where he had been, and seen a glimpse of the mark. In a panic, she’d run back to the camp. She had suspected since they’d run away that he had the mark, but seeing it was a jarring experience. She never mentioned it, always assuming that he had been forced to take the mark.

Suddenly the arm began to pull away from her gentle grasp and she looked up to see Draco’s silver eyes surveying her. He looked worried; perhaps he feared she would run after remembering who he was after last night.

She just moved her hand to his chest and nestled back into him. “It doesn’t bother me.” She said softly. “That’s not who you are.”

Relief washed over Draco as he took her into his arms in a strong embrace. He brought her lips to his in a fervent kiss, which she returned in earnest. She wrapped her arms around his neck as he shifted so he was slightly over her. He broke away and smiled down at her. “Good morning.”

Hermione smiled back. “Good morning,” she replied with a giggle. “How did you sleep?”

He laughed at the formality of her question. Had they not just slept together twice? Surely formality had flown out the window last night. “Very well, thanks. You?”
Hermione moaned and stretched her arms over her head, a welcome sight for Draco. “Great,” she sighed. “Last night was…” she trailed off with a grin and a blush, searching for the right word.

“Amazing.” Draco finished for her, beaming down at her.

Hermione’s eyes sparkled as she smiled and nodded in agreement. “So you really don’t regret it?” she asked.

“Not at all,” he grinned, kissing her lightly.

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After another very happy hour in bed, Hermione and Draco got dressed and discussed their next actions over breakfast. Since their trip to Grimmauld Place had nearly killed them both and given them few answers, they decided to tread a bit more carefully now. It wouldn’t do any good for them to continue to search for Harry and Ron. They had no more leads as to their whereabouts. Hermione suggested that they begin to look for Horcruxes based on what Harry had told her about them before he went searching for one.

“Harry said that You-Know-Who would most likely hide them in places that were significant to him. Admittedly, I know much less about his childhood than Harry does, but it’s a starting place,” said Hermione taking a bite of her bread.

“How will we know if there’s a Horcrux in these places? I mean, they could be anything, right?”

“In theory, but he’ll have made them something important and significant to him to make sure they were preserved. He’ll also have probably put up protective enchantments around them, so we should be able to tell if there’s one nearby from that.” Hermione explained.

“Okay, so where do we start?”

“I was thinking the orphanage where Tom Riddle lived before he went to Hogwarts. It may have been significant enough of a place for him to hide one there. Also it would be a pretty safe bet that no wizards or witches would stumble upon it accidentally and destroy it.”

“Great. So where is this orphanage?”

“London.” Hermione answered.

“London? You want us to go stomping around in the Ministry’s back yard?” Draco exclaimed.

Hermione frowned, “I know it’s risky, but we’re going to be taking a lot of risks if we want to help Harry at all. We’ll go in disguise and keep our heads down. We won’t use any magic unless we absolutely have to. If we do find a Horcrux, we can just take it and find a way to destroy it later.”

Draco sighed, “Okay, we go in disguise. We can’t draw any attention to ourselves. And at the first sign of anyone suspicious, I’m pulling the plug and getting us out of there. Deal?”

“Deal.” Hermione said.

Once they arrived, disguised as an elderly muggle couple, at the location of the young Tom Riddle’s orphanage, it was clear that it had not stood there for many years. An office building stood on the property now and, try as they might, Hermione and Draco could not find any trace of magic.

“I don’t think he would have allowed the building to have been torn down if he had hidden one here.
He would have set up enchantments against that happening.” Hermione said quietly as they returned to the main street from a side alley of the building.

“Agreed” Draco said with a hint of disappointment. “We should get out of here.” He said grabbing hold of her hand and walking briskly down another alleyway to disapparate.

After they set up camp Hermione took off her scarf and boots. Finally looking like themselves again, Hermione took off her coat and flopped onto her bed with a sigh. “Well that was a total waste of time,” she grumbled.

“Not entirely,” Draco countered as he too shed his coat. “At least now we know that there isn’t a Horcrux there. We can move on to other potential places.”

“I don’t know if I even know of any other potential places!” Hermione exasperated. “Harry told me where the one that Dumbledore found was, but that won’t help us.”

“How did Potter get his hands on the one that he destroyed by accident?” Draco asked sitting next to her.

Hermione paused, “He found it. It was thrown away by Ginny after she got it without realizing it from you father.”

Draco blinked, “My father had it?”

Hermione nodded.

“Why would You-Know-Who trust anyone with his horcruxes?”

Hermione shrugged, “I doubt he told your father what it was. Probably just said that it was important and told him not to let anything happen to it.”

“Well, what if he trusted another one with one of the other Death Eaters?”

Hermione stood up abruptly, “Draco, that’s brilliant!”

Draco smirked, “well, obviously.”

“Of course the biggest problem with that being…” she pressed on, ignoring his arrogance and pacing around the tent, “we have no idea who he would give it to or where that person would hide it. And even if we did know both of those things, we would likely be killed trying to get it.”

“I bet I could guess who has it.” Draco mumbled from her bed.

“Really?” Hermione asked, stopping her pacing and looking at him.

He nodded. “There are only a handful of people he would trust with something as important as this. And even fewer who wouldn’t ask questions and would blindly do as they were asked. And when you also consider that the person would have to be intelligent enough to hide it well and keep it safe, well, that really only leaves us with one option.”

“Who?”

Draco’s eyes pierced into hers, “my charming aunt Bellatrix, of course.”

A shiver ran through Hermione. Bellatrix Lestrange. The one who had killed Sirius Black and tortured Neville’s parents into madness. Of course it was Bellatrix. She was the obvious choice.
Hopelessly devoted to Voldemort and wicked enough to protect it at any means necessary.

“Well then it’s hopeless then, isn’t it?” Hermione muttered to herself as she continued her pacing. “The only way to get close enough to Bellatrix to try to find it would be to get ourselves captured.”

“Don’t even think about it, Granger.” Draco warned, standing from the bed and walking over to her. Hermione shook her head. “No, no. Of course not. That would be a suicide mission. We won’t do any good to the cause dead, will we?”

Draco shook his head. “We’ll have to come up with another plan. Or else we can look for one of the other horcruxes.” He grabbed hold of her shoulders and turned her to him, wrapping her up in his arms. “Now, let’s just relax. We can take a beat and then try to figure out some other places he may have hidden one.”

Hermione curled into him, wrapping her arms around him in return. She wished she knew more about what Harry and Ron were up to. They might have more information. They might have a horcrux. They might know how to destroy them. For the time being, all they could do was wait until they knew more.

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For weeks they were out of ideas for their Horcrux hunt. They continued moving around as much as they could, never staying in the same place more than a few nights. It grew colder, a reminder of just how long they had been on the run. By Hermione’s estimate, it was late October or early November by now. If she was correct about the month, it meant that she and Draco had been on the run together for five months.

For the most part, she didn’t mind being on the run with him anymore. Sure, she missed all of her friends horribly, but things had improved greatly. Things were much less tense between them since they had acknowledged their growing feelings for each other. The fact that they were now sleeping together helped too. They still fought of course; old habits died hard. Over all though, they were surprisingly happy considering their situation.

They used their idle time to try to get to know each other more. They talked about their childhoods a lot. They were both only children, so they had a lot of lonely childhood days in common. He told her stories about growing up at the manor and he listened with interest as she told him about her muggle upbringing.

They talked about Hogwarts some, but it was hard to talk about those times without mentioning their past animosity.

“What are we doing, Draco?” Hermione asked one evening after one of he stupidly brought up their days at Hogwarts and his friends, leading to an awkward silence settling between them.

“What do you mean?”

“Are we fooling ourselves here? Do we even actually like each other or is this some bizarre form of Stockholm Syndrome?” Hermione mused. “What I mean is, are our feelings for each other real? Or are you only interested in me because, as far as we’re concerned, I’m the last woman on earth?”

Draco thought for a moment. “Well, are you only interested in me because I’m the last man on earth?”

“I don’t think so,” she admitted, nervous that he wouldn’t reciprocate her blossoming feelings.
“Well I don’t think so either. I think this whole situation just gave us the opportunity to see each other in a way we wouldn’t let ourselves see when we were at Hogwarts.”

Hermione frowned. “Well then why can’t we have a conversation about Hogwarts without fighting?”

He ran his fingers through his hair with a sigh. “I don’t know. Are we crazy? We’ve been enemies since day one. Can we really ignore all of our history?”

“Well maybe we shouldn’t ignore it,” suggested Hermione.

“What do you mean?”

“If we ignore it then it will always hang over us. We’ll have to tiptoe around it every time we talk.” Hermione explained.

“Well what’s the alternative? Every time we bring it up it leads to a fight,” Draco pointed out.

“We forgive each other.”

Draco looked at her and smiled. It was such a simple and innocent request. “Alright. I forgive you.”

“For what?” prompted Hermione.

“I have to list all the things I’m forgiving you for?” Draco laughed.

“Yes. And I’ll do the same. That way we get it all out in the open. Anything we’ve been harboring can be let go of forever.”

Draco thought for a moment and nodded. “I forgive you for punching me.”

Hermione threw her head back with a laugh. “I forgot I punched you.”

“It was impressive, to be honest. But it still hurt like hell. You broke my nose, you know.”

“I did?” Hermione gasped, her eyes wide.

“Yeah,” Draco smiled slightly. “I had to go see Madame Pomfrey to get it fixed.”

“Sorry,” breathed Hermione.

“I forgive you.”

Hermione smiled, “what else do you forgive me for?”

“I forgive you for calling me a ferret.”

Hermione laughed, “I’m not apologizing for that one. That’s hilarious. What else?”

Draco thought for a moment. “That’s it. You haven’t done anything else that warrants forgiving. Truth is, you’ve always been much more pleasant to me than I’ve been to you.” A dark shadow crossed his face.

Hermione grabbed his hands from across the table to keep him from pulling away from her. “My turn.” She sat up straighter. “Draco Malfoy, I forgive you. I forgive you for making snap judgments about me based on my blood. I forgive you for calling me a Mudblood. I forgive you for hexing me
to make my teeth grow. I forgive you for all the years of bullying and nasty comments to me and my friends.”

Across from her, Draco looked miserable. His eyes were heavy with guilt and he wouldn’t look at her.

“But most importantly,” Hermione pressed on, “I forgive you for this.” She pushed up his sleeve to reveal his Dark Mark. “I forgive you for the part you played that night in the Astronomy tower. I forgive you for getting us into this situation.”

Draco pulled his hands away and rolled his sleeve down. “I don’t deserve your forgiveness,” he said miserably.

“That’s not for you to decide. I forgive you. It’s up to you to forgive yourself.” Hermione said gently.

“I can’t. All of this is my fault.”

“Alright, I have some apologies I would like to make.” Hermione announced.

“Apologies? For what?”

“I’m sorry you were born into a family that filled your mind with prejudice. I’m sorry that they taught you to hate. I’m sorry that they aligned themselves with the wrong side. And I’m sorry that you felt that joining him was the only path for you. I’m sorry that he gave you such an impossible mission. And I’m sorry that they all turned on you for having a normal human response to such a choice.”

Draco still wouldn’t look at her. “I’m sorry that I wasted so much time on the wrong side,” he murmured.

Hermione just smiled. “I forgive you for that too.”
The next morning, Hermione woke up curled in Draco’s arms. He was peppering kisses all over her face and neck. She smiled and nestled into him. “Good morning,” she murmured hoarsely.

“Mmm…” was Draco’s only reply as his hands began to creep under the waistband of her underwear.

Hermione’s eyes flew open with a gasp. She let out a happy moan at his movements. “We should pack up and move soon,” she sighed, but her body betrayed her. She rolled onto her back to allow him better access.

He shook his head. “We just got here yesterday. A few more hours won’t hurt us.” He was kissing down her neck and over chest. He pulled her underwear over her hips and down her legs, all the while kissing lower and lower…

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It was well after noon before they began packing up their camp. It took them hours because every time Hermione walked past Draco, he would catch her around the waist and pull her in for a playful kiss. Between that, and all of their grinning and flirtatious glances, it was nearly dinnertime before they disapparated to a new campsite.

“I’ll go find a good spot to set up. Can you get some firewood together?” Hermione said when they landed in the unfamiliar forest.

“Sure,” said Draco. He looked around quickly to make sure they were truly alone before pulling her in for a kiss.

She giggled and pulled away, staying in his embrace for a moment. “I’ll go that way. I’ll go in a straight line and I won’t be far. If it takes you longer than 5 minutes to find me send up some sparks.”

He nodded and she began to walk away, but not before Draco could give her a playful smack on the behind. She turned to see him grinning like a fool after her. Rolling her eyes, but smiling broadly, she walked away from him.

The trees weren’t very thick, but it was hilly and soon she had lost sight of Draco. She was just looking for a clearing big enough for them to set up their tent and proper wards.

“Hermione?” A deep voice came from just behind her.

She jumped and whirled around, whipping her wand out in defense. Standing before her was a tall, messy-haired boy. His eyes wide and his wand in his hand. “Harry?” She said incredulously. She rushed forward for a hug.

“Hold it.” Harry raised his wand and she stopped in her tracks. “Tell me about the moment we became friends.”

Hermione stopped, confused for a brief moment. Understanding washed over her. “You saved me from a mountain troll on Halloween of our first year. Ever since then, you, Ron and I have been best friends.” She smiled. “Who did you take to Slughorn’s Slug Club Christmas party last year?” She
“Luna Lovegood. But I wanted you and I to go together as friends until you invited McLagen.”

Harry replied, lowering his wand.

Hermione threw her arms around her friend.

“We thought you were dead.” Harry murmured into her hair.

“I’ve been looking everywhere for you.” Hermione’s heart was swelling with happiness. He was here, alive and well.

“Ron’s been worried sick.”

Hermione’s heart jumped. “Ron’s with you?”

“Of course! Ron!” He called, pulling away from Hermione.

A moment later, Ron exited the wards, wand ready for battle. He looked at Hermione and dropped his wand and his jaw. “What—?”

Hermione threw her arms around Ron’s neck. “I’m so glad you’re okay.” She muttered in his ear.

He wrapped his arms around her in a protective hug.

“Well, isn’t this a surprise?” came a cool voice from behind them.

Hermione turned to see Draco standing nearby, arms full of firewood. His eyes narrowed in what Hermione could only guess was suspicion and jealousy.

Harry and Ron immediately jumped at him, wands aloft.

“Wait, no!” Hermione cried, jumping in front of Draco before they could rip him apart.

The two stopped and stared at her as if she had grown an extra head.

“I should explain.” Hermione said, her arms still held out to protect Draco. “He’s with me.”

Ron turned a deep shade of red, his eyes narrowing. “With you…?”

“Well, we sort of got trapped together the night that Dumbledore…the Death Eaters were going to kill him and I was on the grounds during the battle. We would have been killed if we hadn’t teamed up.”

Harry and Ron stared at them incredulously. “You…ran off…with him?” Ron seethed.

“Well, at first we were just running from the Death Eaters. We were going to go back to Hogwarts. But then we found out that the Death Eaters had taken over the school we knew we couldn’t go back.” Hermione explained. “We stuck together because we figured we had a better chance of survival.”

“Alright, well now you’re safe with us, so Malfoy, you can run along now and do whatever it is Death Eaters do when they desert the others,” spat Ron bitterly.

“Ron!” Hermione chastised.
“There are a couple of reasons why you don’t want me to walk away,” said Draco darkly.

“Yeah? What might those reasons be?” Ron challenged, advancing on Draco.

“Well for one thing, I know about the horcruxes.”

“You told him?” exasperated Harry to Hermione.

“He proved himself trustworthy,” defended Hermione sternly.

“How?” Ron asked.

“Well he’s saved my life more times than I can count, including when we were ambushed by Yaxley at Grimmauld Place after your debacle at the Ministry made the paper.” Hermione explained hotly.

“You were at Grimmauld Place?” Harry asked in surprise.

“Probably a day or two after you left,” said Draco with a nod.

“We were looking for you after you two made the paper for breaking into the Ministry,” explained Hermione. “And we barely made it out alive.”

“So you just decided to tell him our only tactical advantage? What if he’s communicating with the Death Eaters?” Ron asked.

“Trust me, he’s not.” Hermione said with finality. “He wants to help! We’ve been looking for them!”

“Any luck?” asked Harry.

“No. We checked a couple places. We didn’t find anything.”

“We had some,” said Harry. “At the Ministry.”

“Hate to interrupt what I’m sure will be a riveting story, but don’t you think we should take this little reunion within the wards?” suggested Draco.

Harry and Hermione nodded and moved to head back to the currently invisible camp.

“I’m not sitting next to him in my tent.” Ron seethed.

“Ron, I trust him. That should be enough for you,” frowned Hermione. She grabbed Draco by the hand and pushed past Ron to follow Harry to the tent.

“Weasley’s a jealous one.” Draco muttered in Hermione’s ear, squeezing her hand playfully.

Hermione glanced back to see Ron glaring at their interlocked fingers. “Yes, he is,” she whispered, pulling her hand from his regretfully. “I would appreciate it if you didn’t mention us to him, at least for now.”

Draco nodded, glancing back at Ron before ducking into the tent. The four of them sat down, Ron reluctant and scowling at how close Hermione had chosen to sit by Draco. Harry launched into the story about the horcrux they found at the Ministry. Hermione and Draco listened closely and filled in Harry and Ron on the places they’d been as well. Ron stayed quiet, glaring at how Hermione looked at Draco when he talked.

“We haven’t had any leads for over a month, so we’ve just been laying low. We never stay in the
same place for more than a few days,” said Hermione.

“Oh, shut up.” Ron spat.

Hermione’s mouth hung open as she turned to Ron’s red face.

“Laying low?” scoffed Ron. “Or laying together?”

The color drained from Hermione’s face. “Excuse me?”

“You two are sleeping together! It’s so obvious,” seethed Ron.

“Ron, I hardly think it’s fair to accuse them of that.” Harry reasoned. “Hermione?” He looked to her for her defense.

Hermione looked down and covered her mouth briefly, unsure of what to say, “I…” she stuttered.

“Merlin!” roared Ron, jumping up. “I knew it!” He pulled his wand, causing Hermione to stand, hands raised between him and Draco.

“Ron, calm down.” Harry urged as he stood too.

“Calm down?” Ron balked. “She’s fucking a death eater!”

“He is not a Death Eater!” Hermione shouted.

“Oh wake up, Hermione. Lift up his bloody sleeve! How do we know he’s not just trying to kill you?”

“If I was going to kill her I would have done it right after she ran away with me,” Draco pointed out a bit savagely. Harry and Ron gaped at him. “Obviously I didn’t,” defended Draco.

“Harry, do you believe this?” exasperated Ron.

“Yes,” declared Harry, surprising them all. “Yeah, I was there, at the Astronomy Tower, the night Dumbledore died. Malfoy’s no Death Eater. He may have the mark, but he doesn’t have the stomach or the heart for it. If Hermione trusts him, and I trust her, then I could believe it.”

“Harry…” Ron began incredulously.

“Thank you, Harry,” breathed Hermione.

“I’m not at all happy about you two being…involved. But I know you pretty well, Hermione. You’re smart. You’re not one to fall for tricks or plays. If you trust him enough to…get involved like this, then maybe I can trust him too…eventually.” Harry explained as he extended his hand to Draco, who, looking a little taken aback, stood too and shook Harry’s hand firmly.

“Thanks, Potter,” said Draco.

Harry kept hold of Draco’s hand tightly and looked him firmly in the eye. “But if you hurt her, Malfoy, or betray us, I’ll make You-Know-Who look like a Pigmy Puff. Is that understood?”

Draco didn’t blink. He showed no surprise or hesitation or fear. He merely nodded and said, “Understood, Potter, but you don’t need to worry about that.”

Hermione smiled before Ron brushed roughly past her to his bunk and picked up his bag.
“Ron…” she said softly.

“Obviously neither of you need me, so I’ll just be going,” fumed Ron, glaring at Harry and Hermione.

“Ron, don’t be stupid,” began Harry.

“Stupid? Yes, that must be it. I’m too stupid to trust a Death Eater! Why is it, Harry, that Hermione waltzes in here after months and tells you to trust him, and you do, just like that!”

“I didn’t say I trust him,” argued Harry. “But I trust Hermione, and you should too.”

“I do trust her! But I also don’t trust that he doesn’t have her under some kind of Confundus charm or something. I’ve been by your side since the beginning and you won’t listen to me when I say I don’t trust this ferret!” yelled Ron.

“Okay,” Hermione began argumentatively. “For one thing, I am not under the Confundus charm. For another thing, I did not just waltz in here. I’ve been on the run just like you. And maybe Harry trusts my opinion about Draco because I have been with him for the past five months or so and I’m therefore the only one qualified to pass judgment on this trustworthiness.”

“I think you’re probably likely to be a little biased towards the person who’s giving you orgasms.” Ron spat.

“Ron!” Harry admonished.

“How dare you?” Hermione seethed. “For your information, Ronald, the trust came well before I did.”

Ron turned a deep shade of red, even Draco went a little pink. “Merlin, Granger, are you trying to get me killed?” Draco admonished with a nervous chuckle.

“Well then, clearly I’m not needed anymore. The three of you can continue the hunt without me.” Ron growled.

“Ron, you’re being childish,” Hermione chastised.

Ron glowered at her, zipping up his rucksack and hoisting it onto his shoulder.

“Ron…” Harry warned darkly, “Don’t.”

But Ron just scowled, pulled the locket from his neck and threw it to the ground before storming from the tent. A moment later they heard the telltale sounds of him leaving the wards and disapparating.

Harry pulled his fingers through his hair in frustration, before picking up the locket and putting it around his own neck. Hermione stood staring at the spot where Ron had left. Her face was red and her jaw was clenched in anger. Draco placed his hand gently on her shoulder, but she walked away from him to sit alone.

A strange feeling of dread gripped Draco. Clearly there was something deeper than friendship between Granger and Weasley. Or at least there had once been. They had never talked about their previous relationships, but he had always strongly suspected that he was not her first. Was it possible that Weasley was the one she was with before him? His skin crawled at the thought of Weasley touching Hermione.
Draco didn’t doubt that Hermione’s feelings for him were real, but he also knew that she hadn’t had any other options while it was just the two of them. Could she still have feelings for Weasley? Could their fledgling relationship survive now that they were no longer in their bubble of isolation? He had spent so much of their isolation wishing that it would end. Now he would give anything to be alone with her again.
Chapter 10: Reunion

It took the three of them two hours to merge their camps. They combined their tents to form a large common area with two separate wings. They also created a private bedroom for each of them. Hermione had suggested it, knowing that Harry and Draco were likely to murder each other unless they each had a small space of their own to which to retreat.

Hermione was still angrily making up her bunk when Draco found a moment to speak with her alone. He walked over and sat down on the bunk. “Hey, so at the risk of being hexed, can we talk about what happened today?” he said carefully.

Hermione threw her pillow down in a huff. “What about it?” she snapped.

Draco grabbed her hands and pulled her to sit next to him. She sighed in annoyance, but didn’t pull her hands away. “You and Weasley…” Draco began delicately. Hermione scoffed and rolled her eyes. “You two were together before we left, weren’t you?”

Hermione pulled her hands away from his and ran them through her hair. “No,” she snapped, “we were not together.”

Draco raised an eyebrow at her.

Hermione sighed. “Do you really want to talk about this?”

Draco shrugged, “I never wanted to know before. The past is the past, but I feel like I have a right to know now that your past has popped back into our lives.”

Hermione paused, realizing that he was right. He deserved to know. “There were a few… moments. Things were possibly heading in that direction, I guess. But we were not together.” She admitted.

Draco nodded. “So if I hadn’t come along, you two would be together.”

Hermione smirked slightly, “Draco Malfoy, are you jealous of him?”

Draco scowled. “The day I’m jealous of that moronic weasel is the day I kill myself. Just answer the question, please. Would you two be together?”

Hermione wouldn’t meet his eyes. “I don’t know. Maybe. But that doesn’t matter now. I’m with you.” She grabbed his hands again to reassure him.

“But if you had to choose…”

“Stop.” She interrupted quietly. “I have chosen. Did you not just see that insanity? He’s crazy. He’s irrational. How could I be with someone like that? He and I fight all the time!”

“We fight.” Draco pointed out.

“All couples do, Draco. And you have to admit that we fight a lot less than we did before we got together.”

“I mean, I’m obviously superior to Weasley in every way. What you ever saw in the git is beyond me and frankly, it calls your sanity into question. You picked the better man. I just want to make sure
that you’re not going to have a moment of insanity down the road and regret choosing the better man,” Draco said bringing her hands to her lips to kiss them.

Hermione rolled her eyes at him, smiling in spite of herself. “Listen. Whatever I felt for Ron once is gone. The only thing I feel for Ron now is friendship and, well, at the moment, anger. But you don’t need to worry about him. That chapter of my life is closed.”

Draco smirked. “Everything is books to you, isn’t it?”

Hermione nodded. “I find it an eloquent metaphor.”

Draco leaned in and gave her a quick kiss. “Of course you do.”

Harry ducked into the tent, clearing his throat and looking uncomfortable by their closeness. “We need to talk.” He announced.

Hermione nodded and they all settled at their dining table. Draco and Hermione sat next to each other out of habit, but upon receiving a pointed look from Harry, Hermione moved a respectable distance away from him.

“Just because I didn’t kick you out, Malfoy, doesn’t mean I trust you yet. You’ve proven yourself to Hermione. Now you need to prove yourself to me. You can help us with the horcruxes, but step carefully. One wrong move and I’ll obliterate you and send you home to your charming family. I also want to make sure you both understand how important it is going to be to communicate with each other. We’ve had different experiences these past few months, so we all have different information. We need to make sure we fill each other in on everything we know that might be able to help.

“And it’s going to be a while…probably a very long time before I’m comfortable with this.” He said gesturing to the two of them. “I would appreciate it if you two were a bit discrete for the time being.”

“No promises, Potter.” Draco chuckled.

“No,” Hermione interjected. “Harry, of course we’ll be discrete. He’s joking.”

“Right,” Harry said hesitantly. “This is really weird, Mione.” He stood and walked out of the tent to take the first watch.

“He’s gone. Let’s make out.” Draco whispered excitedly once Harry had disappeared.

Hermione laughed, “No!”

“Why not?” He smirked, leaning over to kiss her neck.

Hermione giggled, but turned her head to block his advance. “Because he’s right outside the tent! We literally just had a conversation about being discrete!”

“He just left! We have at least twenty minutes before he could possibly come back in.”

“You don’t know that!”

“Come on,” he urged playfully. “Five minutes.”

“Umm,” called Harry, poking his head back into the tent. “It’s a tent, you guys. It isn’t sound proof. Please stop.” His head disappeared again. Hermione and Draco looked at each other and laughed.

“I’m actually going to go sit with him a while, if you don’t mind,” said Hermione softly. “It’s just
been so long since I’ve seen him, you know?”

Draco rolled his eyes and sighed dramatically, “Yeah, fine, whatever. Just leave me for the Wonder Boy. I don’t feel betrayed at all.”

Hermione just smiled and gave him a quick reassuring kiss. “See you later,” she mumbled before exiting the tent.

“Hey, Harry,” she said as she sat down next to him.

He looked sideways at her with a smile. “I missed you. I’m so glad you’re alright.”

“You too,” she grinned.

He raised an eyebrow and nodded toward the tent. “You sure about him?”

Hermione blushed. “Am I sure about us? No. It’s…new. We’ve been in a bit of a bubble as you can imagine. But we’ve kept each other safe and I feel…happy since we got together.”

Harry nodded. “Alright. And you’re sure you can trust him?”

“Definitely.”

“And you’re definitely not under the Imperius curse?” Harry asked.

Hermione laughed. “I’m definitely not. You know I’m not so easily controlled.”

Harry leaned a little closer to her. “Is he under the Imperius curse?”

Hermione laughed again and shook her head. “No, Harry.”

“Love potion?”

“Brewing love potions hasn’t been high on our list of priorities lately, funnily enough,” Hermione said with a wry grin.

Harry was quiet for a moment, and then he grimaced and shook his head. “Sorry, I just pictured the two of you together.” He shuddered and Hermione pushed him playfully. He laughed. “Sorry, it’s just weird. I mean, how the hell did it even happen?”

Hermione shrugged. “We were alone together for a really long time, Harry. Things were awful at first. We were at each other’s throats constantly. But we were nearly caught by snatchers a few times, and he protected me…and I protected him. Then we were becoming more civil with each other. Then I started to trust him. After we escaped from Yaxley at Grimmauld I realized that…I don’t know, some part of me cared for him very deeply. And I really believe that he cares for me too.”

“Alright, fine. I accept that this might be something real,” Harry said with a sigh.

“I know it will take you a while, but please try to keep an open mind about him,” she pleaded.

Harry bristled. “I doubt Malfoy and I will ever consider each other friends. But for you, Hermione, I will at least refrain from hexing the ferret.”

“Thanks,” Hermione grinned.
She glanced sideways at her friend, spotting the large locket around his neck. “Hey, is that…?” she gestured to it hesitantly.

He pulled the locket from his neck and held it in his hands. “Yeah,” he said lamely.

“Can I see it?”

He held it out and she took it from him. It was heavy and cold and she felt a dark feeling of dread settle in her as soon as it touched her hands.

“The longer you hold it, the more it affects your mood. Ron had been wearing it since yesterday. I’m sure that had something to do with his behavior earlier. Not that I’m excusing it, of course. We’d been taking turns wearing it.”

“Well the three of us can take turns now,” offered Hermione, ignoring her instinctual desire to never let the evil locket touch her ever again.

“You think it’s wise to let Malfoy wear it?” asked Harry warily.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means I don’t trust him yet, for one thing. For another thing, it might make living with him that much more difficult.”

“I’m sure he would say the same about you wearing it. Things won’t be easy. They aren’t even easy for him and me, but the three of us will just have to work through the difficulties, yeah?”

Harry frowned and replaced the locket around his neck. “I’m glad you’re alright, Mione and that you found me; I just wish you hadn’t come with the amazing bouncing ferret.”

“I wouldn’t have survived all these months without him, Harry. Please just remember that every time you want to strangle him,” Hermione sighed.

They sat in strained silence for several moments. Hermione thought back to that morning when she and Draco had been alone. It seemed like ages ago now. As happy as she was to be with Harry, a heavy stone of worry had settled in her stomach. Could she and Draco survive as a couple now that they weren’t alone? Would their little romantic bubble burst now that they had to cope with a small part the outside world?

“Hey, I nearly forgot,” Harry began, breaking her out of her worried reverie. “Dumbledore left you something in his will. Scrimgeour gave it to me because there were stipulations stating that it go to me in the event of your death. Since we couldn’t find you for such a long time, you were presumed captured or dead.”

“What did he leave me?” Hermione asked, surprised that Dumbledore would think of her.

“It’s a book. No clue why he left it to you. It’s full of children’s stories. Flipped through it, but it didn’t do me any good. But you’re the brilliant one, maybe you’ll find something I didn’t.”

“Can I see it?”

“Of course. Come inside. I keep it in my rucksack.” He stood up and entered the tent, nodding stiffly at Draco as he did. Hermione followed him in and waited as he rifled through his pack in search for the book.
He pulled out a tattered old book and handed it to her. She held it and looked at the cover curiously. “The Tales of Beedle the Bard,” she read curiously.

“My mum used to read me those,” Draco said from his bunk. The canvas door to his room was tied back and he was stretched out on his bunk casually.

Harry and Hermione looked at him, their mouths agape.

“What?” Draco asked. “Didn’t think I had a normal childhood because my parents are Death Eaters?”

Harry and Hermione exchanged a glance. “No, that’s not it,” Hermione insisted hesitantly.

“My mother read me bedtime stories all the time,” Draco insisted.

Feeling slightly guilty about assuming that Draco hadn’t had a normal, happy childhood, Hermione examined the book. None of the stories were familiar to her. She wondered why Dumbledore would choose to leave her a book of children’s stories of all things. It didn’t seem particularly remarkable to her, but if she knew Dumbledore at all he surely had his reasons.

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Late that night, Hermione sat at the table, reading the book by candlelight. So far, nothing had jumped out at her as helpful. She remained as perplexed as ever. Harry had told her that Dumbledore had left him the first snitch he ever caught, and had left Ron his Deluminator. More of Dumbledore’s riddles. Hermione sighed and turned the page to the next story. She had more questions than ever, and a splitting headache to go with them.

She heard raindrops begin to hit the roof of the tent and Draco entered the flap. He spotted her at the table. “What are you doing up? It’s late,” he said quietly, making his way over to her. “Potter asleep?” He asked, looking toward the flap that led to Harry’s makeshift room.

“Yeah,” Hermione replied, barely looking up from the book.

Draco sat down next to her and looked at the book. “You don’t have to figure out all of Dumbledore’s secrets today, you know.”

Hermione sighed and closed the book. “I know, I just don’t understand why he would leave me a children’s book in his will.”

Draco nodded and took the book from her, opening the front cover and examining it casually. “I know how frustrating it is for you to not understand things,” he droned sarcastically.

Hermione blushed and hung her head in her hands. “My head hurts,” she whined.

“Call it a night, Granger,” he urged.

Hermione nodded and pushed herself away from the table. “You’re right, I’ll dig back into this tomorrow. Thanks. Goodnight, babe,” she said, giving him a kiss on the cheek. She stopped short, however, upon realizing what she’d said. He regarded her with amusement, one of his eyebrows raised. She went beet red. “Sorry,” she spluttered, “it just kind of slipped out. I don’t want to…we don’t have to call each other…”

Draco placed a finger to her lips with a smile. “It’s okay…” He leaned down and kissed her quickly, “babe.” With a wolfish grin, he turned and walked into his wing of the tent.
Hermione’s heart glowed with happiness as she lay down in her bunk. She knew it was stupid with everything going on, but even the tiniest moment like that with Draco gave her butterflies. She had obviously never seen it coming, but she had never felt like this before about anyone.

She tried not to think about the future. She was hopeful about the Order’s chances of winning the war. The optimistic side of her was convinced that the good side was sure to triumph, but she knew that they were out numbered. If the Order won the war, she knew Draco would have to answer for the crimes he committed in June. She only hoped that his actions during the war would gain him some leniency. And if Voldemort won the war, she would likely be put to death. And of course all of that would be moot if they didn’t survive the war. She thought, with a feeling of dread in her stomach, their chances of survival were very slim.

She tossed and turned for several minutes before standing up and shuffling to Draco’s bunk. He rolled over when she approached and he moved over to make room for her. She lay down next to him and nestled into his side. He pulled the blanket over her, wrapped his arm around her, and pulled her close. She slowly drifted to sleep listening to his steady heartbeat. If they were doomed to be parted, she wasn’t going to waste a moment of it sleeping in the next bunk over.
Draco woke up early the following morning. The tent was still quiet, and Hermione was still curled against him. He observed her in her slumber. Her dark eyelashes rested against her freckled cheeks and he could see her eyes darting under her eyelids. He found himself wondering what she was dreaming about. He gently brushed some of her unruly hair away from her face and placed a light kiss on her forehead.

She moaned and furrowed her brow at the disruption, but did not wake up. He smiled slightly, an odd feeling settling in his chest. He tried to identify the feeling. He couldn’t think of a word to describe it, but it pounded persistently with every beat of his heart. It was half-joy, half-ache. He was sure he had never felt anything like it before. As frightening as the feeling was, he felt...happy, happier than he ever recalled being.

He slipped out of bed gently and dressed. He picked up his wand and exited the tent into the crisp November air.

He closed his eyes for a moment and thought of Hermione and the feeling she caused in his heart. Holding out his wand, he murmured “Expecto Patronum.”

A silvery wisp erupted from his wand and swirled through the air around him. It lingered for a moment and then disappeared. He sighed in relief, feeling accomplished. It wasn’t a corporeal Patronus, but it was a start. Elated, he tried the spell again and again. It got a bit easier every time, and the silvery wisp got stronger with each attempt.

“You did it,” came a sweet voice from the flap of the tent.

He turned around to see Hermione holding her cloak around her tightly. She was beaming at him. “What were you thinking about?” she asked.

He just smiled and put his wand back in his pocket. As happy as he was with her, it wasn’t something he liked to talk about. He didn’t trust himself to say the right thing around her. He had wasted too many days with her saying the wrong thing. He just walked up to her, took her face in his hands, and kissed her deeply.

“What was that for?” she sighed as he pulled away.

He smirked, “who says I need a reason?” He walked past her into the tent and used his wand to start some tea. As it began to heat up, he turned back to her. She had entered the tent and was smiling at him, but bit her lip the way she always did when she was nervous.

“What?” he probed.

She opened her mouth to say something, but it quickly snapped closed again. She went a little pink before shaking her head dismissively. “Nothing,” she mumbled. “I’m going to get dressed.” She disappeared behind the flap to her bunk.

Hermione berated herself silently as she got dressed. She had nearly said something very stupid to him. She ran her hands through her hair, her heart racing at how close she had been to blurting it out. She shook her head. She didn’t love him. She couldn’t. It was a ridiculous thought. She had just been swept up in the moment. His joy of producing a Patronus, the morning light gleaming off of his
smiling face, and his passionate kiss had been enough to momentarily fool her.

There had just been something about his face when he looked at her after his successful Patronus that had made her heart swell with joy. She longed to know what he had thought of to finally achieve it, and she felt a wonderful fluttering in her stomach at the idea that it might have had something to do with her. But it wasn’t love, she insisted to herself. It couldn’t be.

“Mione?” Harry’s voice cut her emotional turmoil short.

“Coming, Harry!” She called, straightening her sweater and returning to the center of the tent. Draco and Harry were standing awkwardly in the dining area. She observed them curiously for a moment. They were both restrained, clearly holding back all of the aggression and resentment they still held for each other. Hermione smiled nervously, knowing that they were only tolerating each other for her sake.

“Morning, Harry,” she greeted with a smile. She moved to sit at the table and picked up Dumbledore’s copy of The Tales of Beedle the Bard.

“You didn’t waste any time, Granger,” remarked Draco, sitting next to her.

“There’s a reason Dumbledore left this to me. It must be important. I need to figure out why,” Hermione insisted, flipping to the last page she had read.

“Hermione, I don’t think Dumbledore necessarily left us clues through his will. I think they may have just been things to remember him by. The Deluminator Ron got was just a useful thing. It came in handy a couple of times, but it just turns lights off and on. It didn’t help with our search for Horcruxes at all. And the snitch he left me is just a snitch. It’s sentimental because it’s the first one I ever caught, but it’s just a snitch,” Harry explained, sitting across from her.

“Well what was inside it?” Draco asked suddenly. The two Gryffindors looked at him sharply.

“What do you mean?” Harry asked, perplexed.

Hermione’s eyes, however, lit up. “Ah!”

Draco rolled his eyes and sat down next to Hermione. “Merlin, Potter, how is it that the muggle-born knows about this, but you don’t?” he grumbled. “Alright, so snitches have flesh memories. That means they remember the first person to touch them and will open up to their touch when they’re exposed to it again. Dumbledore may have hidden something inside the snitch.”

Harry frowned and pulled the snitch from his pocket and held it in his hands. “Well that explains why Scrimgeour was so odd when he gave it to me. But, it doesn’t open for me.”

“Is it possible that Dumbledore made a mistake? Maybe that’s not your snitch,” Hermione suggested.

“He probably mixed it up with one of the many snitches I caught,” Draco boasted, pulling the snitch from Harry’s hand and holding it expectantly. Nothing happened. “Worth a shot,” he shrugged, tossing the snitch back to Harry.

“Well there must be something wrong. Surely there’s something hidden in there. Is there any other way of opening it up?” asked Hermione.

Draco shook his head. “Well normally, they can open for anyone after they’ve been exposed to the touch of the first person. The flesh memory is put in place to solve disputes in situations when there is a question of which seeker touched it first. But since this one isn’t opening, I’m guessing that
Dumbledore charmed it to open only to the person who first touched it after he hid something in it. If that’s true, then it probably won’t respond to spells or anything like that.”

“Well it won’t open,” Harry grumbled. “And I’m sure the Ministry tried everything they could to get it open. Scrimgeour tried very hard to get me to tell him what we were trying to do. Got really irate when I refused.”

“I’m sure Dumbledore ensured that you would be able to open it somehow. Maybe he just wanted to make sure Scrimgeour couldn’t find it,” Hermione ventured.

Harry just frowned at the snitch in his hands. Surely there was something important within it, and yet it remained frustratingly out of reach.

“All right, so the book, the Deluminator, and the snitch. Was there anything else?” Hermione pressed on.

“No,” Harry replied. “Well, nothing that he could actually give me.”

“What do you mean?”

“He tried to leave me the sword of Gryffindor, but it wasn’t his to give away. I tried to argue for it, but Scrimgeour told me it was missing.”

“What do you mean missing? I thought it was in Dumbledore’s office?” Hermione asked.

“I thought so too, but I guess it’s disappeared since he died,” Harry replied with a shrug.

Hermione frowned. Aside from the obvious reason of wanting to leave Harry with a weapon like a sword, why would Dumbledore want to leave the sword of Gryffindor to Harry? Surely against a wand, a sword wouldn’t do much good. More of Dumbledore’s mysteries. She sighed, turning the page to the next children’s story. The title read The Tale of the Three Brothers. She scanned the first paragraph idly, aware with some annoyance that Draco was reading over her shoulder.

“What’s that?” he asked, pointing to a small symbol in the upper corner of the page.

Hermione looked at the symbol. It was a small triangle, divided by a line, containing a circle.

“A rune?” Harry asked, craning his neck from the other side of the table.

“I don’t recognize it,” Hermione replied. “But I’ll check my books. Maybe it’s just one I’m not familiar with.” She closed the book with a snap. “But first, breakfast.”

Try as she might, Hermione couldn’t find the symbol from the Tales of Beedle the Bard in any of her rune books. She spent days with her nose in a book looking for it, but after double-checking twice, she was confident that it wasn’t a rune.

She had discovered, upon close inspection of the children’s book, that the symbol wasn’t intended to be there. It had been inked in with a quill, possibly by Dumbledore himself. More riddles.

Harry and Draco avoided each other like the plague, only speaking to each other when Hermione was present. It was very awkward for them all, but so far they had managed to keep the animosity between the two wizards to a minimum.

After a month of frustrating dead-ends and nearly constant headaches from Dumbledore’s many
riddles, Hermione finally stumbled across something in her books that triggered a break through.

“Merlin’s pants!” she exclaimed, standing abruptly. Harry and Draco both started, clearly amused by her outburst.

“What is it?” Harry asked, sitting up.

“The sword of Gryffindor!” she cried, pacing in excited circles, still looking at her book.

Draco and Harry exchanged a glance. “What about it?” Draco prompted.

“I know why Dumbledore left it to you!”

Harry stood and moved in front of her to stop her pacing. “That’s great, ‘Mione. Please share with the rest of us,” he said slowly.

“It’s Goblin made!” Hermione beamed, bouncing up and down in excitement.

Harry and Draco just stared at her in confusion.

“Goblin-made objects don’t experience wear and tear like normal metals. They can’t be weakened, they are impervious to rust and dirt. They only take in that which makes them stronger!”

“Wonderful! So Dumbledore wanted us to have an edge over the Death Eaters who will only have old, rusty swords,” Draco droned sarcastically.

Hermione laughed. “No, you don’t get it. Harry already destroyed one Horcrux.”

“Yeah, with a Basilisk fang. Frankly, I don’t see the connection,” Harry said.

“Yes, but after you destroyed it, you stabbed the Basilisk.”

Draco’s eyes grew wide. He turned to Harry. “You stabbed a basilisk?”

“Try to keep up, dear. That was years ago,” Hermione waved him off.

Harry’s eyes lit up, ignoring Draco’s surprise. “The venom, it’s in the sword?”

Hermione nodded. “The sword can destroy horcruxes! That’s why Dumbledore wanted you to have it!”

“Maybe the old man had a plan after all,” Draco intoned.

Hermione turned to him, “I told you he did. Dumbledore always had a plan.”

“Well all of that is brilliant, but it’s a little irrelevant. The sword is missing,” Harry pointed out.

Hermione’s smile faltered slightly before she shook her head, refusing to let her excitement be diminished by this detail. “It’ll turn up. It always turns up when you need it most.”

The following morning, Hermione woke up entangled in Draco’s arms. They had abandoned the pretense of sleeping in separate beds after only a few nights of their new living arrangement. After so many weeks of sleeping next to each other, it felt wrong to sleep apart when they were still so close. Despite this, the frequency of their coupling had diminished greatly. It was hard to find the time with Harry so close by, and Hermione didn’t trust silencing spells to be totally effective inside their tent.
They usually spent their nights quietly talking in each other’s arms. They grew closer and more honest with each other with each passing day. The fractures of their past were nearly all healed, replaced by affection.

She had grown very used to waking up next to him, but she never tired of it. It was a rare chance to see him without any of his walls. Everything he had been taught, his aristocratic posture and way of speaking, his haughty expression, it was all gone in these early morning hours. She had studied him in depth during their time together and she had concluded that this was her favorite version of him. It was just so…honest. His face was relaxed as he slept, and he always held her through the night, loose enough so that she could move around if needed, but tight enough to make her feel safe.

As he woke up, he always groaned quietly and pulled her in tighter, as if trying to cling to sleep for a few more moments. He was grumpy most mornings, but Hermione found it endearing now.

This morning was no different. He cursed at the rising sun and buried his face in her curls. He pulled her close, his broad hands delving under her shirt to caress her stomach. His hiding from the sun quickly turned into an early morning seduction attempt.

He kissed her neck lazily, drawing languid circles on her ribcage. Hermione sighed contently, reaching up to gently scratch the back of his neck the way she knew he loved.

Just as Draco’s hands were inching higher up to her chest, their tent mate rudely interrupted them.

“Hermione!” Harry called from just outside their flap. “Are you awake?”

“No,” snarled Draco. “Piss off, Potter.”

Hermione laughed, “just a second Harry.”

“Traitor,” Draco growled into her ear.

Hermione wiggled away from him and stood up, straightening her clothes. She winked at him and mouthed ‘later.’

“Yeah, right,” he droned, flopping back onto the bunk.

Hermione just smiled and exited the flap.

Harry looked very uncomfortable and a little red in the face. “Honestly, I still don’t know how you stand the ferret, Hermione,” he grumbled as he led them to the table.

Hermione ignored his comment. “What did you want, Harry?”

“Well, I’ve decided where I want to take our Horcrux hunt next.”

“Oh? Where?”

“Godric’s Hollow,” Harry replied.

“Oh sure! Let’s just walk into Potter’s old home where You-Know-Who nearly died. I’m sure that would go brilliantly!” Draco scoffed as he walked into the kitchen area.

Hermione glared at Draco briefly. “He’s being an ass, Harry, but he’s right. That’s exactly the kind of place You-Know-Who would expect you to go,” she said sympathetically.

“Yes, but don’t you think it might be the kind of place he could have hidden a horcrux? It’s
significant to him too. I really think it’s our best move,” Harry said diplomatically.

“Well, I think our best move is to not get ourselves killed,” Draco bit back.

“I’m sorry, I thought you realized that this was a war and not a romantic camping vacation for the two of you. You need to be prepared to die for the cause.” Harry argued.

Draco laughed darkly. “I thought you were supposed to be this great hero. Fat lot of good you’ll do for ‘the cause’ if You-Know-Who kills you exactly where he first tried to sixteen years ago.”

“Stop it, both of you,” Hermione chastised. She was tired of keeping the peace between them. “Harry has a point; we need to do something. We’ll never find all of the horcruxes if we don’t venture away from our camp. And even I’ve been thinking recently that we’ll need to go there. I think it’s possible that Dumbledore may have left the sword there for you to find. But Draco has a point too; it’s extremely dangerous to go there. We need to have a plan, and we’ll need to go in disguise.”

Draco threw his arms up in exasperation and stalked back into his bedroom. Hermione groaned and followed him. She closed the flap and cast a quick Muffliato.

“Why do you have to take his side in everything?” Draco grumbled.

“What? Don’t be so dramatic. I’m just trying to be diplomatic. You’re the one who’s always goading him. He’s under a lot of pressure.”

“Oh, please,” growled Draco. “Don’t give me that. I am so sick of everyone giving Potter passes for being a moron just because he’s the bloody ‘Chosen One.’ We’re all under a lot of pressure. You don’t see me suggesting stupid plans.”

“Well we can’t win the war just hiding in this bloody tent!” argued Hermione.

“I know that! I’m not saying we shouldn’t go. I know it needs to be done,”

“Then why are you so angry?”

“Because you took his bloody side, Hermione!” Draco shouted.

Hermione blinked.

“Every damn day since I started at Hogwarts, it’s been Potter this and Potter that. The bloody ‘Boy Who Lived.’ Youngest seeker in a century, Dumbledore’s favorite. I’m fucking sick of everyone thinking he’s so perfect. I need someone on my side, Granger.”

Hermione softened slightly. Draco was jealous of Harry. Perhaps that was a large part of the reason they had never gotten along. “I know he’s not perfect. Harry has his flaws like anyone else, but he’s my best friend. I’m going to side with him when he’s right and I’ll side with you when you’re right. I don’t take his side just because he’s Harry Potter. I’ve never cared about any of that. He’s my friend and I need you to accept that.”

Draco just frowned and shoved his hands in his pockets.

Hermione stepped closer to him and placed her hand on his chest. “You know I think you’re brilliant, right? I like you a lot, but I’m not going to stroke your ego just to make you feel better. You’re just going to need to trust me and have some confidence what we are.”
Draco didn’t smile, but he did raise his hands to her face gently. “I think you’re brilliant too, but if Potter gets us all killed I’m blaming you.”

Hermione grinned, “I expect nothing less.”
Hermione looked up at the Potter’s home in Godric’s Hollow. It was hard to believe that anyone had ever lived there. The roof had collapsed; the door was off its hinges and stood askew against the doorframe. She held tight to Harry’s arm as he took in the sight. Despite her belief that the plaque outside the house should not have been vandalized, she felt their efforts bolstered by the words of encouragement.

“Let’s go,” Draco said suddenly, opening the gate to the Potter’s walkway.

“What are you doing?” Harry asked.

“Going inside. Isn’t that why we’re here?” Draco replied, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

“We can’t!” Harry protested.

Draco turned back to him in frustration. “Potter, this is your house. I thought you wanted to come back to where it all began. Well, this is it.” He continued toward the house.

Hermione and Harry exchanged a glance. She knew it would be extremely suspicious, disguised or not, for anyone to see them entering the Potter’s home. And it could very well be a trap. A quick ‘Hominum Revelio’ revealed that there was no one inside the house. Hermione shrugged and followed after Draco, gently pulling Harry along with her.

Draco waited on the porch for the two Gryffindors. “After you, Potter,” he said, waving to the doorway.

Harry lit his wand and entered the dark house.

Hermione’s heart broke as she walked in and looked around the house. She could tell that it had once been a lovely and welcoming home. They stood in a modest foyer, the dusty hardwood floors creaking beneath their feet. In front of them was a large curved staircase, and she tried very hard not to picture the body of James Potter laying on them as he tried to protect his family.

She turned to the right to see what was once a cozy living room. Very few personal items remained. All of the boxes had been removed from the shelves, but the furniture remained. A dusty couch sat before a large fireplace. There was a small rocker next to the couch and Hermione approached it hesitantly. A small, worn blanket lay on it, and she picked it up. It was moth-eaten and nearly falling apart from age, but she made out a small, embroidered ‘H’ in one of the corners. This had been Harry’s baby blanket. Her stomach twisted at the thought of the life that her friend had been robbed of in this home.

She could imagine the Potters now, sitting in front of the fireplace; raising their son in a home of love and laughter. She could see them teaching him how to read, and fly a broom, and celebrating when he got his Hogwarts letter. She could see them having Sirius and Remus over for dinner every week and letting her and Ron spend their summers here, in their lovely home.

She turned, spotting Harry as he headed up the stairs. Draco approached her quietly. “You okay?” he breathed, placing his hand on her arm.

Hermione realized that she had been crying and hastily wiped her tears away. “Yes,” she insisted. She cast a quick cleaning spell on the blanket before placing it into her beaded bag.
She looked around the living room once more before moving into the adjacent kitchen. She was hoping to find as many pieces of Harry’s family as possible. Very little had been left behind, but she hoped she could find some memories for him to hold onto.

She opened a few drawers, finding mostly old utensils, before she found a drawer filled with papers. She pulled them out and rifled through them. Most of them were shopping lists or scraps of paper with friends’ addresses.

“What are you doing?” Draco hissed.

“Looking around. Isn’t that why you insisted we come in here?” Hermione replied shortly.

“Okay, fine. But obviously the sword isn’t in that drawer, Granger, so what are you looking for?”

“I don’t know exactly,” she murmured picking up a letter. She unfolded it to see that it was a letter from Dumbledore, dated October 16th, 1981. Just a fortnight before the Potters had been murdered.

She also found several letters from Sirius as well as a couple of old photos of James, Lily, and Sirius. She put them all inside her beaded bag for Harry to see later.

“We shouldn’t linger here too long,” Draco murmured from nearby.

Hermione nodded. “I’ll go check on Harry.”

She walked carefully up the stairs and down the hallway, her heart beating faster as she walked under the open roof and felt the floorboards give a bit under her feet. “Harry?” she called softly.

“Here,” came his solemn voice from the room at the end of the hall.

Stepping over a large hole in the floor, she entered the room. A crib was against the wall and Harry stood over it.

“I thought I would feel more, you know?” Harry intoned without turning around.

Hermione stepped closer to him and placed her hand on his arm gently. “I don’t know if there’s a right or wrong way to feel here, Harry.”

Harry sighed and turned around, looking at his old nursery. “This is where my mother died, Hermione. For me. This is where it all began. Shouldn’t it feel like…coming home?”

Hermione nodded slowly. “I don’t know, Harry. I really don’t.”

“The sword isn’t here,” said Harry moving to look out the window.

“No,” agreed Hermione, moving to stand with him. Her heart stopped.

There was someone standing outside the house looking up at them. It was a small, old woman, covered in many layers of tattered clothing; her pale, wrinkled face barely visible beneath her hood. Clearly a witch, since she could see the house. She was staring directly at Harry, as if she could recognize him despite his Polyjuice disguise.

“Granger,” Draco called from the doorway. His voice was a bit frantic. “We’ve got company.”

“We know,” she replied softly. “I think that’s Bathilda Bagshot.”

Draco raised an eyebrow. “The author of a History of Magic? Why would she be here?”
Hermione backed away from the window carefully. “She lives here. It says so in her book jacket biography.”

“She wants me to come with her,” Harry said, turning from the window and heading for the door.

“Potter,” Draco said sharply, grasping Harry’s arm to stop him. “This could be a trap.”

Harry nodded, “I know.” His voice was steady. Hermione knew that they wouldn’t be able to talk him out of it. He was determined.

“We’ll all go. She’s just one little old lady and we’re disguised. First sign of trouble and we’ll apparate out, okay?” Hermione reasoned.

Harry and Hermione headed down the stairs and Draco followed, grumbling about ‘stupid, suicidal Gryffindors.’

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Draco trailed behind Hermione and Harry as they followed Bathilda Bagshot through the snowy streets of Godric’s Hollow.

“Are you sure about this?” Hermione whispered to Harry.

“Yeah, I have a bad feeling about this, Potter,” Draco murmured.

“She knew Dumbledore. He may have left the sword with her,” Harry hissed in reply as they walked down a narrow path to a small, dark house.

Hermione’s feeling of trepidation did not dissipate as they entered the house. The smell of mold rotting meat was overwhelming. She covered her nose with her gloved hand, fighting the urge to retch.

Bathilda gestured to Harry to follow her up the stairs. Hermione made to follow him, but Harry stopped her, telling her that Bathilda wanted him to go alone. She argued with him for a moment, but ultimately conceded when he pointed out that, if she did have the sword, Dumbledore may have told her to reveal it only to him.

Hermione watched Harry disappear up the stairs with Bathilda. Her heart was pounding. It was too dark, messy, and foul smelling in the house. She didn’t like it. She occupied herself by lighting her wand and looking around. There was a mantle to her right with photographs on it. Harry had asked Bathilda about one of them on their way up the stairs. She examined it. The boy in the photo did not look familiar to her, but he stood next to a man who she was quite certain had to be a young Albus Dumbledore.

On a small table, on top of a pile of books, was an edition of The Quibbler. She smiled slightly, picking it up. She glanced at the headlines: The Chosen One: Where Is He? And 50 Ways to Show Your Resistance Against He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named.

She was just about to put the magazine down when she spotted it: in the upper right-hand corner was the symbol. The same symbol Dumbledore had written in The Tales of Beedle the Bard and that someone had carved into the Peverell tombstone she had just seen in the Godric’s Hollow graveyard.

“Draco, look at this,” she breathed, pointing to the symbol. He took the magazine to examine it.

Hermione looked back to the table. The pile of books caught her attention. There were several copies
of the same book. The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore by Rita Skeeter.

Hermione picked up one of the books. She flipped through the first few pages before slipping it into her beaded bag. Draco raised an eyebrow as she took the magazine from him, putting it into her bag too.

“She has so many copies. I’m sure she won’t miss it,” Hermione justified with a shrug.

Just as Draco opened his mouth to respond, there was a thud and a muffled cry from upstairs.

“Harry!” Hermione cried, darting for the stairs, tripping over the mess on the floor. Draco hoisted her to her feet and followed her up the stairs.

There was a great snake at the top of the stairs. It was coiled around Harry who was writhing and gasping.

Hermione shouted a curse, singeing the snake’s tail. It released Harry and rounded on her. It reared back to strike and lunged forward. Draco pushed her out of the way just in time and she stumbled sideways, her head smacking into the wall.

Seeing spots, Hermione fell to the floor. She caught a glimpse of Draco cradling his arm and firing a spell at the snake, which recoiled.

Hermione’s head was spinning, blackness was overtaking her, but she had to get to Harry. He didn’t seem to be aware of what was happening. He was muttering to himself, his eyes unfocused and glassy.

Draco shot another spell at the snake, this time knocking it down the stairs. It collapsed to the lower level of the house with a clatter. He grabbed her arm and pulled her up. “Come on Granger, stay with me. Don’t make me save you both,” he forced out. He was bleeding profusely from his left arm; she could feel it’s sticky heat beneath her fingers as she clung to him.

“I’m alright,” she mumbled, but she was unsteady on her feet. She stumbled into him several times as they made their way to Harry. She spotted Harry’s wand and picked it up.

“He’s coming. Hermione, he’s coming,” Harry uttered through his incoherent mumblings.

Fear gripped Hermione. Voldemort was on the way, and she could hear the snake reeling its way back up the stairs. Draco hurried over to Harry, pulling him up to his feet. Harry was still not fully conscious, leaning limply against Draco.

Hermione wheeled around in time to see the snake lurching forward at them. Her head still spinning, she shouted a curse, watching as it rebounded all around the room. The snake recoiled, injured, but not dead. She grabbed onto Draco and Harry, feeling the pull of Draco’s apparition, which whisked them away from Godric’s Hollow.

~*~*~*~

Harry was in his semi-conscious state until the following evening. Hermione took a potion to stave off her concussion and healed Draco’s snake-bitten arm with dittany before sitting dutifully by her friend’s side while Draco set up camp. She alternated her time between sleeping in a nearby chair and flipping through the Quibbler or the book she had taken from Bathilda Bagshot’s house.

“Hermione,” Harry said weakly.
She looked up from the book in surprise. “Hey. How are you feeling?”

Harry grimaced and pushed himself to sitting. “What happened?”

“Well, the snake had you when we came upstairs. I don’t know where it came from. What happened to Bathilda?” Hermione asked.

“The snake came from…inside her, I guess. It was a trap. Malfoy was right. I’m guessing she’d been dead for a long time,” Harry said miserably. “Thanks for getting me out of there.”

Hermione blinked. “Oh, Harry, I didn’t. I would have, of course, but I hit my head. I was really disoriented.”

“Then how…”

“It was Draco. He apparated us both out. I was a mess. I…I cast a spell at the snake right before we apparated out and it rebounded…” she trailed off nervously.

Harry was looking around. “Do you have my wand?” he asked.

Hermione’s heart beat faster. “That’s actually what I was getting to…”

“Where’s my wand, Hermione?”

Hermione reached into her bag and pulled out the splintered remains of Harry’s wand. “The spell I cast that rebounded must have hit it. I’m so sorry, Harry. I tried to fix it, but wands are tricky.”

Harry frowned and held his broken wand. His face was red and his brow was furrowed. “Well, we’ll just have to share, I guess. I’ll take over the watch if you want to give me yours.”

“Harry…I’m really sorry,” she said again.

“It’s fine,” he bit out, his tone clipped. He held out his hand expectantly.

With a heavy heart, Hermione handed him her wand, feeling suddenly very vulnerable without it. “Harry, are you sure you’re alright? I’m sure Draco can handle the watch for a while longer if you want to rest.”

“I’m fine,” he insisted, standing up and donning his coat. He quickly left the tent leaving Hermione alone with her guilt.

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“You’re not worried about him?” Draco asked her after he entered the tent.

Hermione shrugged, chewing on her lip nervously. “Of course I am. But this happens sometimes with him.”

“What is it?” he asked.

“He has some kind of…connection to You-Know-Who. Sometimes he can see what He sees and sometimes it affects him for a long time.”

“Connection?”

“Yeah, a couple years ago, Professor Dumbledore tried to get Harry to learn Occlumency with
Snape, but he wasn’t very good at it.”

“It doesn’t sound like an issue of Occlumency to me,” Draco frowned.

Hermione shrugged, glancing over her shoulder to the entrance of the tent. “Well, Dumbledore seemed to think that it would help. I tell him all the time that he needs to keep practicing, but I don’t think he can always help it.”

“What’s so damn hard about Occlumency?” Draco grumbled, pulling his pillow out of the bag and tossing it onto their bed.

Hermione raised an eyebrow at him as she shed her coat. “It’s a pretty advanced skill.”

“It’s really not that hard,” he asserted mockingly.

“You know Occlumency?”

Draco nodded. “Snape taught me last year. I didn’t think it was that hard.”


Draco grinned smugly. “You should never be surprised to hear that I’m better than Potter at something.” He pulled her close, his lips hovering over hers.

Hermione pulled away slightly, smirking. “Talk to me when you beat him at Quidditch.” She patted him patronizingly on the chest before turning away to continue to unpack.

Draco laughed darkly. “Low blow, Granger,” he growled, catching her around the waist and pulling her back into him.

She squeaked as their chests collided and grinned up at him.

“You’re gonna pay for that,” he hissed before scooping her up and dropping her unceremoniously onto their bed.

Hermione squealed with laughter. “Wait, wait,” she whispered. She reached forward and pulled his wand from his pocket, eyeing his arousal with anticipation, and cast a quick ‘Muffliato’ at their bedroom entrance.

Draco shed his coat and shoes. He climbed onto the bed and loomed over her. “It’s been too long,” Hermione rolled her eyes. “We had sex like three days ago, Draco,” she laughed.

“That’s too long,” he growled, before silencing Hermione’s laugh with his lips.

He pulled her sweater off quickly before smoothing her flyaway hair down. “Have you ever considered shaving your head?” he quipped, pulling her hair aside to kiss down her neck.

Hermione laughed, “only like every day.” Her laugh turned to a soft moan as Draco reached the sensitive spot behind her ear.

Her hands flew to his belt, unbuckling it with enthusiasm. She pushed his trousers and boxers over his hips and down his legs. He kicked them off awkwardly, his hands delving under her tank top to palm her rib cage. She gasped at the feel of his icy hands on her body and arched up into him.

She pulled his shirt over his head before pulling her own off as well while he pushed her jeans and
knickers down her legs. He shed his boxers before kissing her hungrily.

His hands were everywhere and she could feel her arousal building in her core. She kissed him with fervor, taking his lower lip between her teeth and pulling on it gently. He moaned against her lips and ground his hips against hers.

She pushed his shoulders to roll on top of him, smirking at the look of shock on his face. She leaned down and kissed down his pale neck to the curve of his shoulder before nibbling on his ear. He groaned, running his hands over her waist and hips. She swiveled against him, enjoying the feel of being in control.

She gently guided him in before starting a steady pace, rolling her hips as he thrust up into her. She sat up, bracing her hands against his chest as she rode him. He placed his hands on her hips to guide her motions. Already, she could feel the waves of pleasure building within her.

Draco watched as she threw her head back, her mass of curls bouncing around her shoulders, her mouth open and her brow furrowed in pleasure. She was close, he could tell. He lowered his hand to make little circles on her with his thumb as they increased their pace. It wasn’t long before her eyes flew open and she let out a soft cry, her walls contracting around him as she came undone. After just a few more thrusts, Draco was done as well, coming inside of her with a grunt.

Hermione smiled down at her lover as they both came down from their high. “Do you forgive me for what I said?” she asked.

Draco chuckled and shook his head, “Darling, I don’t even remember what you said. I’d forgive you for anything right now.”

She leaned down and kissed him gently before rolling off of him. He pulled her into his side and she rested her head on his shoulder.

“Thank you for getting us out of there last night. You were amazing,” she said softly.

Draco shrugged, “I’m sure you two would have been fine without me.”

“Maybe, but I’m very glad that you were there.”

He kissed the top of her head and pulled her tighter against him.

Hermione lay for a moment, feeling his heart beat against her hand. She smiled. “Hey, I—” she trailed off.

“What?”

She shook her head and nestled into him further. “Nothing.”

~*~*~*~*~

Hermione was not next to him when he awoke. The space next to him was cold and empty. He sat up, shaking the sleep from his head and looking around the darkened tent. He stood, following his feet to the common area of the tent. It was dark and vacant, but there was light coming from beyond the entrance. He ducked his head to exit the tent and stopped short.

He was suddenly in the vast, brilliant ballroom of Malfoy Manor. Masked figures were all around him. Potter was bound in the corner, but he appeared to be unconscious. He looked around for Granger, but she was nowhere to be seen.
“Well done, Draco,” came a high, cold voice. Draco wheeled around. The tent was gone, and the Dark Lord stood before him, his lips curved into a wicked smile.

“Thank you for bringing Potter to me. I do regret the loss of your little girlfriend. She got in the way, you see.”

Draco’s blood ran cold. Voldemort’s snake-like eyes flickered to the floor behind Draco. He tutted without regret. “Such a waste. She truly was very powerful.”

Draco turned to see his deranged aunt Bellatrix standing over Hermione. She grinned at him, showing her graying, jagged teeth.

Lying motionless at her feet, was Hermione, her skin eerily pale; her eyes open wide and unseeing. There was a pool of blood beneath her.

“NO!” he shouted, his blood pounding in his ears. He threw himself to the floor next to his fallen lover. Her blood soaked through the knees of his trousers and stained his hands. He pulled her body to him, feeling her frail body slick with blood.

“There, there, Draco,” Voldemort jeered softly. “She was only a Mudblood.”

Draco’s stomach twisted painfully as he looked down at Hermione, hauntingly beautiful even in death.

There was so much blood.

Draco awoke with a jolt and a gasp.

Hermione stirred next to him, but she was here and she was alive. He clutched at her body, warm and breathing. No blood. She was alive. They were safe.

Just a dream, he thought with relief. It was just a dream.

“What’s wrong?” Hermione mumbled, still half asleep.

“Nothing,” he replied, burying his face in her curls and breathing deeply. He could feel her warmth and her pulse beating resolutely beneath her skin. “You’re fine. Everything is fine.”

She must have sensed his terror, for she wrapped her arms around him and held him close. Her fingers delved into his hair and made soothing circles on the back of his neck.

Slowly, his pulse returned to normal; although, he couldn’t quite get the image of Hermione’s pale cold body, and all of her spilled blood, out of his mind.
Hermione woke up the following morning still curled against Draco. He was clinging to her a bit tighter this morning. She placed a little kiss on his chest before tilting her chin up towards his face. His eyes were open and his brow was furrowed slightly. He seemed lost in thought.

He noticed her gaze and smiled thinly before kissing her nose.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

He shook his head. "I'm fine, love. Really."

"Don't shut me out, Draco," she urged seriously. Whatever had spooked him last night was clearly still weighing heavily on him.

"I'm not. Everything is fine."

"Draco…"

Draco sighed exasperatedly. "It was just a dream, okay? Everything is fine. Happy?"

Hermione was silent for a moment. "Well, no, I'm not happy. But I can tell you don't want to talk about it. If you change your mind I'll be here to listen." With a kiss, she extracted herself from his grasp and dressed quickly. She rummaged through her bag for her usual contraceptive potion before spotting the items she had taken from Godric's Hollow for Harry.

"Shit," she murmured as she pulled out the blanket and letters.

"What?" Draco asked as he pulled his sweater over his head.

"I forgot to give these to Harry," she explained.

"Maybe it will put him in a better mood," Draco droned, exiting the bedroom into the common area.

Rolling her eyes at Draco's sour attitude, she followed him. "Harry?" she called outside of his area of the tent. There was no response. She peeked inside to find it empty. Perhaps he was still on watch. She pulled her coat on and walked out of the tent.

He was nowhere to be seen. The smoldering remains of his fire were a harsh sign that he had not been here for several hours. Her heart picked up immediately. Could he have left them as Ron had? Was he that angry with her breaking his wand that he would steal hers and leave them both behind? Could Snatchers or Death Eaters have taken him? Guilt and horror gripped her. Something had happened to her best friend while she had been with Draco. How could she have let her guard down like that? "Draco, Harry's not here," she called frantically.
He exited the tent, eyes wild, wand drawn, his hand closing around her arm protectively.

Just as her thoughts were near panic, she heard the sound of someone entering the wards.

Harry was walking through the trees toward the tent, and he wasn't alone. Behind him, carrying the Sword of Gryffindor was Ron Weasley.

Draco's body relaxed slightly, his grip on her arm loosening.

"What are you doing here?" Hermione demanded sharply as they approached.

Ron held up the locket. Open, broken, destroyed. He grinned sheepishly.

"How the hell…?" Draco asked.

"It's a long story," Harry smiled.

"So I guess that means you'll be rejoining us?" Hermione huffed, crossing her arms.

"I was hoping to. I shouldn't have left in the first place. I'm sorry, Mione." Ron said.

"And what makes you think you can just waltz back in here after all this time?" Hermione spat, recalling his claim that she had waltzed in all those weeks ago.

"Well, I did just destroy a bloody horcrux," Ron pointed out combatively.

Hermione rolled her eyes. "Well, congratulations. Welcome back. You can have my bedroom. I never use it anyways," she said coldly before disappearing back into the tent as Ron's ears turned bright red.

Harry clapped Ron reassuringly on the shoulder before following Hermione into the tent.

Draco and Ron stared at each other.

"Why come back, Weasley?" Draco asked.

"They're my friends. It's my responsibility to be by their sides and help them. I wouldn't expect you to understand."

"You think playing the hero will win her over? She's not stupid enough to fall for that," Draco drawled.

"No, she's not. So I'll be her friend, just like I've always been. But one of these days, Malfoy, you're going to screw up. You'll fall into old habits, say or do something to insult her or hurt her, and she'll realize that being with you is a mistake. And when that happens I'll be right there to clean up your mess. I don't care if they think you've changed," he walked a bit closer to tower over Draco. "You'll always be the same slimy ferret to me." He brushed roughly past Draco and into the tent.

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"Harry," Hermione said timidly, approaching his bunk.

Harry grunted in acknowledgement.

"I meant to give you these yesterday. I found them in Godric's Hollow." She held out the letter's she had taken from the Potter's kitchen drawer along with the baby blanket.
Harry took them from her hesitantly and held them in his hands. "Thank you."

She sat down next to him. "I am sorry about your wand, Harry," she said solemnly.

"I know. It's okay. Ron had an extra one he took off some snatchers. It's not the same, but it'll do for now," Harry replied. "Did you read these?" He gestured to the letters.

Hermione shook her head. "Before I forget, I wanted to talk to you a little more about what happened in Godric's Hollow. You really need to stop letting You-Know-Who in."

"Hermione—"

"I know, Harry. But you really need to try. You know he can manipulate you that way. And what if he saw where we are, or that we're hunting horcruxes? You're putting not just us, but the fate of the war in jeopardy by not taking this more seriously!" she chastised.

"I don't need the guilt trip, Hermione. What do you expect me to do? I'm doing my best. I didn't exactly get the best training when it comes to Occlumency."

Hermione thought for a moment. She had an idea, but she doubted either of them would go for it. "Draco knows Occlumency. Maybe he could teach you," she suggested.

Harry frowned. "No," he insisted.

"Harry," Hermione sighed. "Don't let your stupid macho pride get in the way."

"Hermione, this has nothing to do with pride. Just because Malfoy and I have reached an understanding doesn't mean I want him picking around in my brain."

"I'm sure he wouldn't—" Hermione stammered.

"I'm sure he would. Besides, I doubt he'd even agree to teach me, so it doesn't matter," Harry said dismissively, opening one of the letters.

Knowing she wouldn't make any more progress in this conversation, she left him alone. Perhaps Draco would be more reasonable.

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After a lengthy discussion, Hermione convinced Draco to agree to teach Harry Occlumency as long as Harry agreed to being taught. Between her arguments with Harry and Draco, she had successfully managed to avoid Ron while he got settled. She knew he would want to talk to her soon and she was dreading it.

She felt so guilty. When she had been on the run with Draco, she had missed both Harry and Ron so dreadfully, but after his horrible reaction at their reunion, she hadn't been too upset to see Ron go. She tried to remind herself that Ron was still her best friend, but if he truly cared for her as he claimed, he wouldn't be such a prat to her. He would want her to be happy, even if that meant being with someone else.

She settled at the dining table with the Quibbler that she had taken from Bathilda Bagshot's house. The symbol on the cover kept popping up, and she was determined to get some answers. It had to mean something. She was sure that this was what Dumbledore had intended for her to discover in the book he left for her.
She read the Quibbler cover to cover. She even put on the ridiculous swirled yellow glasses that were included in order to see hidden messages in the issue (they also claimed to reveal wrackspurts around people's heads, but Hermione knew better than to believe that nonsense). She read the issue upside down and even held it up into a mirror. She tried every spell she could think of to reveal hidden inks or images. It was all to no avail.

"If I were Luna..." she murmured, turning her head this way and that, scrutinizing the odd magazine.

"What?" came a voice from behind her, making her jump. Ron had just entered the tent and approached her cautiously.

"Oh, I was just looking for something in the Quibbler." Hermione said somewhat coldly.

Ron walked over and settled across from her at the table. "Can we talk?"

"Ron, I really don't want to..." Hermione snapped, rolling her eyes.

"Just hear me out," he hurried to interrupt.

Hermione sighed. "Fine, I'm listening."

Ron cast his eyes down for a moment, chewing on the inside of his cheek. "I never should have left," he announced. "I feel awful about it. I should have stayed and fought...for you."

Hermione's heart was beating fast. A year ago she would have given anything to hear Ron say these words to her, but now they just sat heavy on her heart and filled her with guilt and dread.

"I was just so angry that you'd been with...him all that time and that you two were...together." He spat the last word bitterly.

"Ron," Hermione said gently. "You know I never meant to hurt you. My relationship with Draco..."

Ron grimaced, but she pressed on. "It has nothing to do with you or our friendship. I'm going to explain it to you, because I really need you to understand. And even if you don't understand, I need you to hear it."

Ron dragged his freckled fingers through his hair with a sigh. "Fine. I'm listening."

"Draco and I were alone together for five months. Aside from strangers in isolated muggle towns that we saw at a distance and our horrifying brushes with snatchers and Death Eaters, he's the only person I saw for all that time. He stood by me through everything. It wasn't easy, but he didn't give up on me. There were times when I thought he might be the last friendly face I ever saw in my life. It changes you after a while. At first we were just coexisting, then that turned into tolerance, and that turned into something much...better, stronger, more beautiful. He's saved my life more times than I can count, Ron. And he saved Harry's the other night too. I know you don't like him and that there's a lot of bad blood there, but he really has changed." She paused, chewing the inside of her cheek momentarily. "Well, he's changed in the important ways."

Ron seemed to be increasingly interested in his fingernails.

"I'm not expecting you two to suddenly be best friends. I actually don't expect you two to ever really be friends. I just hope that you can accept that I'm with him and at least control your temper. Your friendship is important to me and it would mean a lot to me if you could accept this."

Ron pursed his lips for a moment before nodding stiffly. He stood up and walked into his bedroom.
"Well, all things considered, that could have gone much worse," said Draco with a smirk from the entrance of the tent.

Hermione looked up at him and shrugged. "That's true, I guess." She put the swirled yellow glasses back on and turned back to the magazine.

Draco laughed. "Babe, what the hell are you doing?"

"Trying to figure out what this damn symbol means," Hermione replied in frustration, turning the magazine upside down again.

"Hermione, look at this." Harry walked quickly up to the table, barely pausing at the sight of her in the ludicrous glasses. He held out one of the letters that she had taken from Godric's Hollow.

It was the letter written to James and Lily from Dumbledore. "Look at the signature," said Harry.

The symbol was there, in the place of the A in Albus.

"We have to figure out what it means," insisted Harry. "He used it in the letter to my parents. They must have known what it was."

"It's in the Quibbler too," said Hermione, pointing to the tiny symbol in the corner of the cover. "And in the book I found at Bathilda Bagshot's house. In a letter that he wrote to Gellert Grindelwald."

"We should go see Xenophilius Lovegood," suggested Harry.

"Who's that?" Draco asked.

"Luna Lovegood's dad. He's the editor of the Quibbler," Hermione explained.

"That batty Ravenclaw girl?" Draco scoffed.

"She's a little…eccentric," admitted Hermione.

"That's an understatement," Ron grumbled, having just re-entered the common area.

"Ron, didn't you say the Lovegoods live near your house?" Harry asked.

Ron nodded, looking mildly dejected at being left out of the conversation until this moment. "They live about a mile away from the Burrow."

Hermione removed the ridiculous glasses and closed the magazine, looking once again at the curious symbol. "Well, I think it's time we get some answers."

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By the time Hermione realized that Xenophilius was attempting to trap them, it was too late. The Death Eaters arrived quickly. She barely had time to hide Ron and Draco under the invisibility cloak before they were under attack. She made sure they caught a glimpse of Harry before apparating them all out.

"Fuck!" exclaimed Ron as they appeared in yet another forest. He pulled the invisibility cloak off of him and Draco before scrambling to stand. "What a complete disaster! That fucking traitor!"

"He's a traitor? You're the one who nearly let me go while apparating. Look at by leg, you weasel!" Draco seethed.
Hermione threw herself down next to Draco, who was writhing in pain, clutching his calf. "Someone hand me the dittany!" she urged, bending over Draco's splinched leg. It wasn't horrible, just some deep gashes. He was lucky not to have lost his leg.

"I didn't do it on purpose," claimed Ron. He rubbed his arm where Draco had dug his nails into it in an attempt to not get left behind.

"Like hell you didn't," countered Draco. Sweat was breaking out on his brow as he gritted his teeth against the pain.

Harry summoned the dittany out of her bag and placed it in her outstretched hand. She unstopped the cork and began to drop it onto his open wounds. He hissed in pain.

"I can't believe he would try to turn us in to You-Know-Who. He was supposed to be our ally," Hermione lamented, trying to slow her pounding heart.

"He was just desperate," Harry defended gently, digging in Hermione's bag for the tent. "You-Know-Who has Luna. Any parent would have done the same, I'm sure."

"Nice of you to be so self-sacrificing, Potter, but some of us don't have a death wish," Draco growled, grimacing against the pain in his right leg.

"We got out alive, and relatively unharmed." Draco scoffed, scowling at his bloody leg. "And we got the answers we needed," Harry said.

"Yeah, some bullshit myth about the Deathly Hallows. I mean, do you honestly think that is what Dumbledore wanted you to figure out?" Ron asked as he helped Harry with the tent.

"It could be true," Harry mused.

"You think it's possible that Death himself appeared to three brothers and gave them a wand, a resurrection stone, and an invisibility cloak?" Draco quirked an eyebrow. He winced as he moved his leg experimentally.

"Just rest it for now, babe," urged Hermione quietly as she placed the dittany back into her bag.

"I realize the Death part of the story is fairly ridiculous, but those items could exist," Harry argued. "I've known for a while that You-Know-Who is looking for a wand. I think he could be looking for the Elder Wand. You can see why. I mean, if it really is an unbeatable wand…"

"There's no such thing as an unbeatable wand, Harry," Hermione insisted. She could tell he was beginning to obsess over this and was hoping that she could stop his spiral of worry before it got too far.

"But you have to admit…"

"Harry," Hermione interrupted with a blazing look "There's no such thing."

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A/N: I hope you enjoyed it! Reviews motivate me to continue writing more than anything! But Kudos and bookmarks bring me joy too. Follow me on tumblr: hginny25
Insecurities

Chapter Notes

Just a short little chapter for you all. I hope you enjoy it! Leave me a little review or some kudos if you did!
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“I’m serious, Granger, the rat tried to drop me,” Draco seethed from their bed some hours after their escape from the Lovegood house.

“Are you absolutely sure?” Hermione asked, sitting next to him to check his wounds beneath his bandages. “I know he’s angry and he doesn’t like you, but I doubt he’d try to have you killed.”

Draco grabbed her arm and pulled her to face him. The hard look on his face caused her breath to hitch in her throat. When he spoke, his voice was deep and severe. “You threw the cloak over us. I was on the end. You were holding Potter, Potter held Weasley, and Weasley held me, until he didn’t. As soon as I felt the pull of your apparation, he loosened his grip and tried to leave me behind. I’m sure of it. The bastard tried to kill me.”

Rage gripped Hermione’s heart. Terror at the thought of Draco being left behind with the Death Eaters, and the pain of betrayal that Ron would do such a thing to anyone, let alone someone she cared so deeply for. She stood abruptly and marched out into the common area of their tent.

Ron and Harry were standing near the opening of the tent when Hermione stalked over to them.

Before either of them could speak, Hermione pulled back her arm and slapped Ron as hard as she could across his cheek.

Harry stumbled back in shock and Ron gaped at her, clutching at his cheek.

“How dare you, Ronald?” Hermione seethed darkly. “To try to have him killed over what? Some petty childhood rivalry? You’re a fool. You’re both on the same side now! And even though he hates you, he would never do anything like that to you because he knows you’re important to me. And you, one of my best and oldest friends, would intentionally attempt to hurt the man I’ve chosen to be with?

“Well, I won’t put up with it. Stay away from us until you’ve grown up and decide you’re ready to be a true friend to me again. And if you try to hurt him again, I’ll cut you out of my life faster than you can say Quidditch.”

Before Ron could argue, she turned on her heel and returned to Draco’s side in their room. She pulled the curtain down and cast a Muffliato.

“Did you know you’re sort of terrifying?” Draco asked with a chuckle.

“Only when crossed,” Hermione grumbled. She was shaking in anger, but her lip was quivering slightly and she had tears in her eyes.

“Hey,” he breathed, reaching out to grab hold of her hand. “What is it?”
She shook her head, willing herself not to reveal this kind of weakness to him. But it was no use, the tears were coming, and there was no stopping them now.

“Come here,” he coaxed gently. “It’s okay. I’m fine.”

“That’s not it,” insisted Hermione. She sank down onto the bed next to him. “It’s him. He’s supposed to be my friend…my best friend. And to think that he would do something so hateful…I just feel so betrayed.” She wiped tears from her cheeks in frustration.

“Well I’m not surprised. Given your…history with him.”

“What do you mean?” sniffed Hermione.

“Well you slept with him, right? Before we ran off?”

Hermione blinked. “No, I didn’t! What gave you that idea?”

“You didn’t? I just thought I wasn’t your first.”

Hermione smirked slightly. “You weren’t.”

“Then who…?”

Hermione frowned. “Why do people always assume that Ron is the only one who has ever been interested in me?”

“That’s not what I meant,” Draco insisted. “I’m sure there were lots…” he trailed off, realizing how unconvincing he sounded.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Oh, please.” She knew that Draco had hardly looked at her before they had run away together; that any attraction he held for her physically had grown gradually, after many months of growing attracted to her mind. Perhaps he thought her beautiful now, but caring for a person tends to make them sort of beautiful in one’s eyes.

Draco patted the bed next to him and she inched closer to his side. “Will you tell me who your first was?”

Hermione blushed and tuck a wayward curl behind her ear. “Do you remember that I went to the Yule Ball with Victor Krum?”

Draco’s mouth dropped open. He gaped at her for several seconds, opening and closing his mouth like a fish. “Krum? Fourth Year?”

“No!” Hermione protested. “Well, yes, it was Victor, but not fourth year. We snogged a bit that year, but nothing more. We stayed in touch after the tournament. We wrote owls pretty consistently and after my fifth year he invited me to come to Bulgaria to visit him. We were just friends, really, but while I was there we sort of rekindled. I knew nothing would come of it. There was too much distance between us. But he was kind and gentle and I thought it might be nice, you know, to have my first time be with someone I would never have a falling out with. He and I would never have some messy break up that left us with bitter feelings. We’re friends, and that experience will never be tainted for me. It was nice.” A small smile graced her lips at the memory.

Draco was still staring at her with wide eyes. “You…lost your virginity…to Viktor Krum…” he said slowly, still not quite believing it.
Hermione nodded, amused by his stupor.

“You sure know how to make a guy feel inadequate, Granger,” Draco remarked with a chuckle.

Hermione laughed. “Why? Because he’s a famous Quidditch player? Why should that make you feel inadequate? You know I never really cared that much about the game anyways. I liked him because he was kind and strong and steady and he made me feel beautiful. No boy had ever made me feel beautiful before,” she confessed quietly. Her heart was beating quickly. She looked down at her hands, but she could feel Draco’s eyes on her. She felt naked under his gaze in a way she hadn’t in many weeks with him. Sharing her bed was one thing, but sharing her insecurities was quite another. She always did her best to push them down and never let them show.

Draco grabbed hold of her hand gently. “And Potter and Weasley…do they know?”

“No. I’ve never told anyone about it until now,” admitted Hermione. “I’m not ashamed of it, but I just liked having the experience be just for the two of us. No one has ever asked me about it to be honest. And he’s the only person I was with before you. Alright, I told you. You tell me. Who was your first?”

Draco shrugged. “I’m afraid it wasn’t as poetic and meaningful as yours. It was with Pansy last year. She was asking a lot of questions about what was going on with me, so I kind of did it to shut her up.”

“That’s a horrible reason to sleep with someone,” frowned Hermione.

“I know. But she really wanted to; it was so obvious. And I’m a bloke. I wasn’t strong enough last year to resist her when she came to seduce me. I tried, but then she started asking me what was going on with me. I couldn’t have her figuring out what my mission was. So I slept with her. She quit asking questions after that.”

Hermione turned his hand over in hers, her fingertips delving under his shirtsleeves to dance across his Dark Mark. “How did you hide it from her?” she asked quietly.

Draco shifted uncomfortably. “A simple glamour charm. It didn’t last long, and it doesn’t really work if you already know what’s there, but she didn’t. I never bothered to hide it from you because I was sure you knew it was there.”

Hermione thought for a moment that this was likely his greatest insecurity. He was a jealous man, yes; but that paled in comparison to his shame at becoming a Death Eater. This ugly mark on his arm was a painful reminder of his choices. She couldn’t help but think that her insecurities were fairly stupid compared to his. And after all, she didn’t feel so plain when Draco was looking at her.

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January brought a thick blanket of snow to the Forest of Dean. The weeks dragged on in cold shades of grey and blue. Gradually it was clear that their tent was divided. Most days Harry and Ron kept to themselves and Draco and Hermione kept their distance. Hermione did her best to stay on good terms with Harry, but it was difficult when Ron was always by his side. Whenever the four of them were all together they discussed the horcruxes and where they might find them. They discussed the potential of the Deathly Hallows and the idea that Voldemort might be searching for the Elder Wand.

Despite Hermione’s best efforts, Harry remained obsessed with the idea of the Deathly Hallows. He even seemed to be hoping for the moments when he saw glimpses of Voldemort’s thoughts.

“Alright, Occlumency. Now,” said Draco to Harry one afternoon.
“Excuse me?” Harry grumbled, raising his eyebrow skeptically at the blonde.

“Granger says you’re still having visions or whatever and you’re putting us all in danger by letting him in. I’m good at Occlumency. I wouldn’t have survived last year if I weren’t. I’m teaching you. Get ready.” Draco pulled his wand from his pocket.

“Listen, Malfoy, I’m not…” Harry began.

Draco wasn’t listening. He raised his wand. “Legimimens.”

In a rush, Draco saw the wand maker Ollivander cowering before him, screaming and writhing under the influence of the Crucius curse. Then the wand maker Gregorovich in a similar situation, though he met with an unpleasant end after his questioning. He saw himself standing in the Astronomy Tower; wand trained on Dumbledore and removed the spell instantly.

Harry was breathing hard. “Who said you could look around in my mind?” Harry seethed.

“You agreed to this,” reminded Draco, trying his best to pretend not to be shaken by the sight of himself in Harry’s memories. “I wouldn’t be able to look around in your mind so much if you would just block me out. Divert my gaze away from the information you want to keep most secret.” He paused as Harry straightened up. “Get ready,” he said before hitting Harry again with the spell.

The memories Draco saw this time weren’t as long this time. Just glimpses of moments before he could feel Harry attempting to block him out. A flash of the Slytherin common room, mermaids and grindylows in the black lake, a great snake writhing in pain as he thrust a sword through its skull, a giant chessboard, and a girl with shining red hair leaning forward and her eyes fluttering closed.


“Wait, just a moment to rest,”

But Draco didn’t wait; he hit Harry again, seeing a brief flash of Dumbledore falling over the railing of the Astronomy tower before…

“Protego,” cried Harry.

Draco was still seeing flashes of memories, but they were his own. Hermione’s fearful eyes just before she grabbed his hand and ran into the forest, Hermione’s laugh as they shared the cake, Hermione throwing herself back to save him from Yaxley, Hermione’s wide eyes just before he kissed her for the first time, the look in her eyes after she saw his patronus, Hermione’s look of bliss as he made love to her, Hermione, Hermione, Hermione…

“Stop!”

Harry’s mouth was agape in shock. “I…I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to…”

“It’s fine,” Draco said shortly. “Let’s just get back to it, yeah?” His cheeks were a little pink. How could he have let himself get caught off guard like that?

“Yeah,” Harry agreed. “Malfoy, I…” he paused, shifting his weight between his feet awkwardly. “I’m glad she had you all those months.”

Draco blinked in surprise, before forcing a smirk. “Don’t get all soft on me now, Potter. You ready?”
Harry nodded with a smile, and their lessons continued.
Trapped

Chapter Notes

This is quite a long chapter, which hopefully makes up for the fact that it's been a few weeks since I've updated. I hope you like it. Things take a bit of a turn in this one. Please review if you feel inspired to do so!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Mione,”

Hermione looked up from her book in surprise. Ron had not spoken directly to her since she had warned him to keep his distance a month ago.

“Yes, Ronald, what is it?” she asked icily.

He sat down across from her and cleared his throat. “I’m sorry,” he began. “About what I did at Xenophilius Lovegood’s. It was a shit thing to do. I didn’t plan it, really. I didn’t even really realize what I was doing until I felt him slipping through my fingers. I…I hate the git, but I never thought I was low enough to try to kill him. I hate myself for that. I’m really sorry.”

Hermione examined him for a moment. He seemed to be genuine enough. His eyebrows were knitted together and he couldn’t seem to meet her eye. His cheeks were flushed with shame.

“I believe you,” she breathed. He looked up in surprise. “But it isn’t my forgiveness you need. You have to apologize to Draco.”

Ron grimaced. “I was afraid you would say that.”

Hermione shrugged. “Like it or not, Ron, he’s here, and I don’t think he’ll be going anywhere for a while. You may as well be civil with him.”

“You’re such a hypocrite.”

“Excuse me?” Hermione balked.

“You, demanding that I apologize to him,” Ron began bitterly. “When he nearly killed me last year with that poisoned mead.”

Hermione’s heart sank. She had spent so much time being angry with Ron over his treatment of Draco since they had met up on the run that he had forgotten about all of the horrible things Draco had done to Ron at Hogwarts. “It was an accident. He didn’t mean for you to drink that,” she breathed.

“That’s true, but it still almost killed me. And how do you think it made me feel to find out that you’re sleeping with the git that tried to kill me?”

“I’m sorry, Ron. I forgot about that. I forgave him for everything he did last year ages ago.”

“Yeah, well I didn’t,” Ron said bitterly.
“He apologized for everything,” Hermione defended.

“Well he didn’t apologize to me,” he snapped.

Hermione chewed the inside of her cheek for a moment. She reached across the table and placed her hand tentatively on top of his. “I’ll see what I can do,” she breathed before retreating back to her bedroom.

~*~*~

It was two weeks before Draco swallowed his pride enough to give Ron a tense apology for the poisoned mead. When he did, Ron returned the favor by apologizing for nearly dropping him. It wasn’t a long conversation, and they certainly did not leave it suddenly becoming friends. They ended the uncomfortable conversation with an awkward handshake and a curt nod before returning to their separate areas.

Their civil progress should have pleased Hermione, but she had much more worrying issues on her mind suddenly.

She guessed that it was late February when she woke up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat. Her head was spinning and her mouth was watering. She extracted herself from Draco’s grasp as quickly as possible without waking him before hurrying to the washroom. She barely made it to the toilet before retching violently into it. She pulled her hair away from her face with one hand, gripping the basin with the other one.

What could this be? Food poisoning? She thought back to what she had eaten today. A simple stew from things she’d found in the forest and a rabbit Harry had managed to catch. Food poisoning was possible, she supposed.

After her vomiting had subsided, she vanished the evidence (as they had to with their waste as there was no plumbing in their tent) before casting a cleansing charm and a breath freshening charm.

Still shaking, she returned to bed, hoping that none of the boys got food poisoning too.

As she crawled under the blankets, Draco stirred. “Hey, where you been?” he asked groggily.

“Bathroom,” she replied vaguely, nestling into him. Her stomach was still churning, but she no longer felt like she was going to be sick.

“Hmm…” groaned Draco in response before promptly falling back to sleep.

~*~*~

She added the last ingredient to the potion before pricking her finger and letting a drop of her blood fall into the vial. The mixture stayed milky white for a few moments before unmistakably turning a vibrant gold.

With a shuddering breath, tears began to run down her cheeks. The vial dropped out of her hand and smashed on the wooden floor of the tent, the gold liquid splattering everywhere. She sank to her knees and let herself cry.

“Hermione! Are you almost done? I need to use the loo.” Ron called from beyond their makeshift washroom door.

Hermione wiped her eyes and cleared her throat. “I’ll be right out,” she replied. She cleaned up the
potion and glass shards with a quick spell. She stood and looked into the small bathroom mirror and wiped her eyes. They were red from crying. Maybe he wouldn’t notice.

She opened the door and walked past Ron with her head down. He hardly looked at her as he walked past her. Needing to be alone, Hermione crossed the tent and exited into the cold February air. She tried to walk past Harry without him noticing how upset she was.

“Hey. Where are you going?” he asked as she walked past him.

“Nowhere. I just fancied a walk,” Hermione said, cursing the waver in her voice.

“Are you alright?” Harry asked, his brow furrowing.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” she lied.

“Then look at me.”

Hermione reluctantly turned around and looked at him, knowing that her puffy cheeks and red-rimmed eyes were a dead giveaway.

“Yeah, you’re not fine. What’s wrong? Did Draco…?”

“No, nothing like that. I’m fine. I just need some time.” Ignoring his protests, Hermione turned and walked away. She walked for several minutes before she found a small frozen lake and sat down next to it.

She sat and wallowed in her misery for several moments before she heard a twig snap behind her. She whipped around, her wand in her hand instantly, but it was only Harry.

She sighed and put her wand back in her pocket. Harry sat down next to her. He didn’t say anything; he just sat next to her.

“I wanted to be alone, Harry.”

“I know.” He didn’t move though, he just sat next to her. As miserable as she was, his presence was actually calming her down.

They sat in silence for several minutes, before Harry reached into his pocket and spoke. “I found something with the Snitch,” he announced.

“Oh?”

“Yeah, I remembered that at my first Quidditch game, I didn’t catch the snitch in my hands. I nearly swallowed it.” Harry pressed the snitch to his lips briefly before handing it to Hermione.

She watched as words appeared on the tiny golden orb. “I open at the close,” she read. “What does that mean?”

“I have no idea,” Harry said.

Normally, Hermione would have gladly speculated on the many possible meanings of Dumbledore’s words, but she was far too distracted at the moment. She merely stared across the lake, feeling the icy air blowing through her hair. More minutes passed in silence.

“Does Malfoy know?” Harry asked abruptly.
Hermione looked at him, her eyes wide in terror. “What?”

Harry gave her a knowing look. “You’re pregnant, right?”

Fresh tears rolled down Hermione’s cheeks. “How did you know?” she cried.

“Give me some credit, Hermione. I know I can be really dense about some things, but I like to think I know you a little by now.” Harry leaned forward and placed his elbows on his knees. “You’ve been moody for weeks now; longer than your usual monthly moodiness.” Hermione blushed that he could notice such things about her. “I’ve heard you throwing up in the night a few times. And, forgive me, but you’ve had a few…physical changes.” He gestured toward her chest, his cheeks growing pink.

Hermione pulled her coat closed over her swollen breasts in embarrassment.

She had suspected the worst for several days now. At first, she couldn’t be sure. Time passed without notice on the run. It was hard to say if it had been one month or two since her last. But when she realized that it was likely now late February, but she hadn’t had to deal with her monthly since before their trip to Godric’s Hollow, and considering the sickness she’d experienced in the middle of the night for the past week, she had figured out what had happened. It wasn’t food poisoning. None of the boys had gotten sick. And as if that weren’t enough evidence, Hermione had spent 5 of the last seven nights sick in the bathroom. Finally, she had to face the possibility that it was something much scarier and much more serious. She didn’t know how it had happened. She was always very careful with her contraceptive potions. She had wracked her brain, trying to remember if there had been a time that she had forgotten.

With a horrible sinking feeling she had remembered the morning a couple of days after Godric’s Hollow. She’d reached into her bag for her potion and gotten distracted by Harry’s letters and blanket. She cursed her stupidity.

“Draco and Ron, do you think they’ve noticed too?” she asked fearfully.

Harry shook his head. “Well, you know Ron. He wouldn’t notice if a troll walked through the tent. It doesn’t seem like Malfoy has noticed either. It’s lucky for you that you get your morning sickness in the middle of the night.”

“Yeah, except I’m fucking exhausted all the time.” Hermione grumbled.

“You should tell him. Malfoy I mean,” Harry remarked.

Hermione sighed. “I don’t know how to. I can’t believe this happened! We’re usually so careful.”

“Spare me the details, please.” Harry cringed.

“I feel so stupid. I’m not ready for this, Harry,” Hermione moaned miserably.

“Of course you’re not. You’re eighteen, and we’re in the middle of a damn war. The timing is awful. But you can do this, Hermione. You’re the most talented witch I know. And I still say Malfoy is a prat, but he’s good with his wand. We’re a pretty good team, the four of us. We’ll look out for you.” Harry reassured her.

Hermione rested her head on his shoulder. “Thanks,” she breathed. She was still terrified and filled with dread, but it wasn’t as acute as it had been earlier. She closed her eyes and felt the brisk wind in her hair, trying to quell the new worry she carried within her.

“He loves you, I think,” offered Harry.
Hermione’s breath caught in her throat, her heart beat faster at the thought. She lifted her head from his shoulder and glanced at him. “What makes you say that?” she asked.

Harry looked sideways at her. He smiled slightly. “When he was teaching me Occlumency I accidentally saw a few of his memories. They were all of you.”

Hermione blushed. She didn’t want to entertain the thought too much. She and Draco didn’t put their feelings for each other into words. It was a system that had worked out for them so far. “Maybe he does,” she replied weakly.

“Yeah, maybe,” Harry murmured. “Do you love him?”

The question hung in the air between them for a moment, and Hermione hoped that he couldn’t feel how hard her heart was pounding. She had thought to herself in quiet moments that she might be in love with Draco, she had even attempted to tell him once or twice, but she had always chickened out. Saying it aloud meant admitting to herself and to him that she needed him in some way. Not that she wasn’t still an independent woman. She didn’t need him to provide for her or take care of her. She just needed him. She needed him to be there with her. “I don’t know,” she breathed. “Maybe.”

Harry grinned. “Yeah, maybe.”

~*~*~

Over the next several days, Hermione began to think of herself as a mother. Was she maternal? She had never given much thought to having children. It was a decision that she had always thought would be years away. She certainly hadn’t expected to have to face it at eighteen years old in the middle of a bloody war.

Would they still be on the run seven months from now? Would she have to give birth in a tent without professional help, with only her lover and two best friends to help her? She tried to imagine Draco, Harry, and Ron attempting to deliver her baby. She shuddered at the thought, suspecting that none of them would be particularly helpful. And after the baby was born, if Hermione even survived the trauma of giving birth in the wilderness without healers, she would have to care for a tiny human life while also hunting horcruxes and fighting Voldemort.

It didn’t help that she was now having very vivid dreams, most of which involved herself running into battle, wand held high in one hand, cradling a baby in the other. It might have been a comical thought, if she weren’t so miserably terrified.

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Something was wrong with Hermione. Draco could tell. She was very good at hiding it, but he could still tell. In small moments when she thought no one was looking at her, he could see the worry and turmoil creep into her features. She no longer slept curled into him with her head on his chest, but instead slept on her side facing away from him. Furthermore, she’d been having nightmares. Sometimes he would wake up to feel her twitching, or hear her ragged breath. Every time he tried to confront her about these changes, she brushed him off with a smile and a reassuring kiss, and told him that everything was fine.

Perhaps she’d grown tired of him, Draco wondered horribly as March brought the beginnings of spring thaw to the forest. Perhaps now that she had both Potter and Weasley back in her life, she didn’t need him anymore. Although, she was being distant with them as well. Occasionally he would see pointed looks between her and Potter. They had a secret, Draco was sure of that. He only wished she would let him in on it.
One night he was awoken by Hermione jolting awake with a gasp. She sat upright, her hands clenching at her stomach in terror.

“What is it? Are you okay?” Draco asked, sitting up and rubbing her back.

Hermione took a shuddering breath before dissolving into tears. She hung her face in her hands and cried. Draco pulled her against his chest, cradling her head. “It’s okay. Whatever it is. I’m here.” He pressed his lips into her hair. “I’m not going anywhere.”

Hermione wrapped her arms around him and squeezed him tight. “I’m sorry,” she warbled. “I’m so sorry.”

“What is it?” he asked after several moments when her breathing slowly returned to normal.

“Just a dream, I guess,” she said, wiping her eyes and lying back down.

“Granger…Hermione…” he began seriously.

“Hmm?” she hummed. She was already turning away from him, curling into a ball and closing him out.

He wanted to confront her, start a fight if he had to, just to get the truth from her in any way he could. But perhaps this wasn’t the time for that. He lay back down on his back and looked up at the ceiling of the tent.

“I know something’s been bothering you,” he said gently. “I hope it isn’t anything that I’ve done. Just know that I’m here if you want to talk about it.”

Hermione didn’t move for a moment, but he could tell by her sniffling that she was still awake.

“Is it something I’ve done?” he asked fearfully.

Hermione slowly rolled over to face him, a small smile gracing her lips. “No. It’s not.” She bit her lips for a moment before gazing up at him with wide, hesitant eyes. “I…I’m…”

Her mouth closed and she just shook her head with a small smile, another tear escaping an eye and rolling down her cheek. “Nothing,” she breathed. But she inched closer to laid her head on his chest, and for now that was enough.

~*~*~

The following evening, Weasley was meticulously turning the dials on his radio, every now and then prodding it with his wand and muttering under his breath. Harry was holding the snitch between his fingers, trying to decipher the cryptic message from Dumbledore. Hermione and Draco were reading side by side. With a sudden crackle and a brief squeal of feedback, the radio station came through.

“Good evening, and welcome to Potter Watch,” said a voice.

All four occupants of the tent sat upright and moved closer to the radio. Aside from Ron, none of them had had any contact with other members of the resistance. The desire to know what was happening out there was strong.

“This is your host, River.”

“Who is that?” Harry asked quietly.
“Lee Jordan,” replied Ron.

“We apologize for the long gap in our programming. This was due to a number of house calls in our area from those charming Death Eaters. As always, we are committed to providing our listeners with the truth that the Ministry refuses to share with the public. And now, the list of today’s casualties. We regret to report that long-time Order supporters Dirk Cresswell and Ted Tonks have been killed at the hands of Death Eaters.”

Hermione’s breath hitched in her throat. “Tonks’ dad,” she breathed to her fellow Gryffindors.

The broadcast continued. “Dean Thomas was believed to be travelling with Tonks, Cresswell, and two goblins. One of the goblins, Gornuk has also been killed, and Dean Thomas and the other goblin are missing. If anyone has knowledge of Dean’s whereabouts, please find a safe way to get word to his family. They are desperate for news.”

They listened as Lee shared the news about a Muggle family of five that had been killed in their home, and of the discovery of Bathilda Bagshot’s remains found in her home. And they shared in a moment of silence for those who had died.

Hermione had her head bowed and her eyes closed. For a moment, Draco thought that she might be praying, but when her eyes opened and found his, he saw the tears in them. She was thinking of the muggles, no doubt, and the horrible end they had met. It could have been her own parents if she had not obliviated them. He reached out and grabbed hold of her hand, squeezing tight.

After the moment of silence, Lee introduced Royal, a regular contributor and Ron excitedly blurted out “Kingsley!”

Draco didn’t know who Kingsley was, but he immediately liked the wizard speaking. He had a calm, authoritative, and fierce voice. Draco hoped that this was the man leading the resistance.

Kingsley discussed the toxic propaganda being spread by the ministry before Lee introduced Romulus for a feature called ‘Pals of Potter.’

“That’s Lupin!” Ron exclaimed again.

“Shh, we know!” Hermione snapped, leaning closer to the radio.

Lupin was telling the other two that he was sure that Harry was still living.

“Bill told me that Tonks is pregnant. And she’s getting pretty big too…” said Ron.

Hermione flinched suddenly and Draco saw her exchange a look with Harry.

“How wonderful,” Hermione squeaked, sounding breathless.

Lupin told them that Xenophilius Lovegood had been arrested, and that Rubeus Hagrid was on the run after escaping arrest.

“The arrest of Xenophilius Lovegood has brought us some new information. A secret supporter who works at the ministry has told us that when Lovegood was brought in, one of the Death Eaters accompanying him said that he saw Harry Potter at Lovegood’s house just before the arrest. And he said that Harry was with a girl matching the description of Hermione Granger,” Lupin said.

“For listeners who might not know,” began Lee. “Hermione Granger went missing the night of the attack on Hogwarts last June and is presumed dead. But she was never found, so Romulus, do you
believe that it is possible that she is alive and with Harry?”

“It’s possible, of course. But it’s also possible that this Death Eater was lying to try to gain favor from the Chief Death Eater as we are calling him. I would very much like to believe that she is alive and unharmed.”

“And if Harry and Hermione were listening right now, what would you tell them?” asked Lee.

“I would say that we’re all with them in spirit, to keep each other safe, and to trust their instincts and each other. Harry’s instincts are rarely wrong.”

A new correspondent, Rapier, brought the three Gryffindors into an excited state, as it turned out to be one of the Weasley twins. He shared the news that Voldemort had been spotted abroad.

“Thank you, Rapier,” said Lee. “Listeners, that brings us to the end of another Potter Watch. Keep listening for us. The next password will be ‘Mad-Eye.’ Keep each other safe: Keep faith. Goodnight.”

With a brief sound of static, the radio flipped off. The four exchanged looks. Potter was beaming.

“Brilliant, eh?”

“Yeah,” said Harry. “Did you hear what Fred said? He’s abroad! I knew it. He’s looking for the wand.”

“Harry—“ Hermione began.

“Come on, Hermione. Why are you so determined not to admit it? Vol—“

“NO!” roared Ron.

“—demort’s after the Elder Wand!”

“The Taboo! We’ve got to put the protections back up!” Hermione exclaimed.

But it was too late, there were voices coming from outside the tent. They were coming from all around them. They were surrounded. “Come out with your hands up! We know you’re in there,” came a raspy voice from the darkness outside the tent.

Hermione wrenched her hand from Draco’s and pulled out her wand. For a brief moment he thought she was going to try to fight their way out, but then she pointed her wand at Potter’s face. There was a bright light as her hex hit him square in the nose and he doubled over in pain.

The next moment was chaos. No less than six large men had charged into the tent, pulling them all to their feet.

“Get your hands off me, don’t you know who I am?” Draco said, thinking quickly and hoping that his voice sounded more confident than he felt. He didn’t recognize any of these men, so he could only assume that they were not Death Eaters. Perhaps he could talk their way out of this.

The snatchers looked at him oddly.

“You twits have bungled a nine month undercover mission.” He rolled up his sleeve, exposing the Dark Mark on his arm.

“Who are you?” asked one of the snatchers, awe evident in his voice.
“Draco Malfoy,” came a voice from the head of the tent.

Draco turned to see Fenrir Greyback entering the tent. His blood ran cold.

“He says he’s with these three on an undercover mission,” the snatcher announced.

“Did he?” Greyback drawled, his yellow eyes surveying the blonde. “Well I happen to know that no such mission exists.”

Draco scoffed. “They don’t tell you everything, Greyback.”

Greyback scowled. “Perhaps. But I’ve heard enough about your betrayal to know that you’re not in anyone’s good graces at the moment. Now, surrender your wand, or I’ll sink my teeth into your little girlfriend.” He jerked his head towards Hermione, who was being held by one of the snatchers, her brown eyes darting between him and Harry’s swollen, unrecognizable face.

Regretfully, but knowing it was his only choice, Draco handed his wand over to Greyback, who passed it to the snatcher holding the other three confiscated wands.

“Well, let’s look at your little friends, shall we, Draco?” Greyback said turning towards the other three. “What happened to you, ugly?” he asked Harry.

“Stung,” Harry muttered.

“What’s your name?”

“Dudley. Vernon Dudley.”

“Check the list,” he barked to a nearby snatcher.

“You look familiar,” Scabior purred to Hermione.

“Actually, she looks familiar to me too,” Greyback said. “Isn’t she the Mudblood that McNair said he saw at Lovegood’s house? The one who was with Potter?”

“Potter?” Scabior repeated with glee, rounding on Harry. He walked close to him and examined his face.

Everyone seemed to be holding their breath as Scabior brushed Harry’s fringe away from his forehead and saw the stretched, misshapen hint of his lightning scar.

“It is!” Scabior exclaimed. “We got Potter!” He beamed and turned to Greyback. “Do you want to call him here?”

“No, I…we should take them to the Manor,” Greyback stammered. Draco knew that, while Greyback fancied himself a Death Eater, he did not have the mark, and therefore could not call the Dark Lord to their tent. For at least a few minutes, they were safe.

Greyback rounded on Draco, his lips curling over his sharpened teeth into a wicked sneer. “Well, Draco, how ‘bout a trip home to see Mum and Dad?”

Chapter End Notes
Everything you recognize from this chapter came from, or was paraphrased from The Deathly Hallows. I cannot take credit for all of that.

I hope y'all don't hate the fact that Hermione is pregnant. I will explain my inspiration behind that happening soon, but stick with me! I promise this story will not suddenly become all about Pregnant Hermione. As always, please review and let me know what parts you liked, disliked, etc. And follow me on Tumblr: HGinny25.
Manor

Chapter Notes

And less than 48 hours later, here it is! I live in the midwest, and as some of you may know, we've had some frightfully cold weather this week, which gave me lots of time off of work to write and edit.

This is the Malfoy Manor chapter, and it's a hard one. I do apologize to all of you, but you knew it was coming eventually. Our heroes are in for some difficult times ahead of them, I'm afraid. I've actually had this scene written for months as well as a couple of chapters that follow it. So hopefully I'll have Chapter 17 up fairly soon as long as I have time to do all my editing and polishing. I hope you enjoy my take on these events.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Draco was pushed to his knees along with the others in the grand ballroom of his own home. Of all the ways he had imagined returning to his home, this had to be the worst of them. Next to him, Hermione’s eyes were wild with fear. He could tell that she was assessing their situation, trying to figure out a solution. He was too, and he couldn’t think of anything that would get them out of this. They were magically bound, which eliminated the slim possibility of physically overpowering their captors. He knew exactly how strong the wards around Malfoy Manor were. They could not apparate from within the Manor or on the grounds within the lines of their property, which extended at least a kilometer in each direction. His eyes flickered over to the fireplace, which had been closed with bars to prevent any floo activity. No luck there. They were trapped. And if his gut was correct, Voldemort would be here soon, if he wasn’t here already.

“What is this?” came a high, haughty voice. His mother had entered the room. Her silver eyes swept over the snatchers and the three Gryffindors before settling on her son. “Draco!” she cried in surprise. She ran over to him, falling to her knees in front of him. Draco forced himself not to react as his mother took his face in her cold hands, wiping away his tousled locks and checking him over for injuries. His heart ached at receiving such motherly affection again. He longed for her to take him in her arms like she used to when he was young. He wished more than anything that she would tell him that everything was going to be okay. How would she react when she found out the truth?

“Why is my son restrained with these prisoners?” Narcissa demanded of Greyback. His father and his Aunt Bellatrix had also walked into the room. They looked surprised to see him, but regarded the scene coolly, with curiosity.

“He was with the others when we found them. This is Potter.” Greyback pointed to Harry.

Narcissa looked at Potter. His face was still distorted thanks to Hermione’s stinging hex.

“Are you sure?” she said, inspecting him.

“This is the Mudblood we’ve been looking for too. Potter’s friend. The one McNair said was with Potter at Lovegood’s. The one we know your son ran off with last June.”

His mother’s grey eyes settled on Hermione. Before he knew it, his mother had slapped Hermione across the face. “No!” he cried, struggling against his restraints.
“How dare you take my son away from his family?” Narcissa spat viciously.

“Cissy,” came Bellatrix’s wild voice. “You forget that Draco ran away from his responsibilities and from his promises. He’s a traitor.”

“How do we know that Draco did not plan this all along? Tag along with Potter and his friends to gain their trust. Perhaps he has brought them to us along with information for the Dark Lord. If that is true, then he is a hero, and should be rewarded,” Lucius drawled from across the room.

Draco’s stomach tightened. Clearly he and his father now had very different definitions of what made a hero.

He looked at his father. At first glance, Lucius seemed just as proud and resolute as ever, but after a moment Draco noticed the signs of fatigue in the man. His hair, though still tied back in his usual style, was clearly thinning a bit. His eyes were sunken and his skin sallow, and he leaned more heavily upon his walking stick than Draco had ever seen. And there was something about his eyes. They were somewhat vacant. Either from months of torture or a very well-cast imperious curse, Lucius was not quite all there.

Bellatrix moved close to Draco, her silver eyes surveying him curiously. “Is that the way of it, Draco?” she asked.

From the corner of his eye, he saw Hermione glance at him briefly. He only hoped that she wouldn’t believe what they said.

“Well?” demanded Bellatrix.

Draco raised his eyes and looked at her defiantly, but said nothing.

Bellatrix sneered. “You see, Lucius? Your traitor son has shown his true colors now.”

Narcissa looked at her son, her eyes glassy. “He is still my son,” she said firmly. “Untie him.”

“If you release him, you’re a traitor too,” Bellatrix spat.

“Lucius, how can you just stand there? Our son is being treated like a common prisoner,” Narcissa protested defiantly.

Lucius looked at his son with distain. “If that really is Potter, and Draco was with him willingly, then he is no son of mine.”

His father’s words hit Draco like a punch to the gut. Any lingering hope that Lucius’ affection for his only son would outweigh his misguided loyalty was smothered in that moment. Imperious curse or not, he was as good as disowned now. He looked at his mother, hoping beyond hope that she would stand up to her husband and sister for once in her life.

She didn’t. For a brief moment he thought she would, but suddenly the fire behind her eyes extinguished and she looked at him vacantly. She stood robotically for a moment before moving away to stand by her husband. He had no doubt that his mother was now under the influence of an imperious curse as well.

“How do we know that Draco did not plan this all along? Tag along with Potter and his friends to gain their trust. Perhaps he has brought them to us along with information for the Dark Lord. If that is true, then he is a hero, and should be rewarded,” Lucius drawled, avoiding looking at his son.

Narcissa looked at him, mouth agape. “And what will he do to Draco when he sees him here with them?” she breathed. She had managed to momentarily shake off the bonds of the imperious curse.
Bellatrix grabbed her by the arm and pulled her in. “You have a responsibility, Cissy. Potter is in your home. He is the priority.” She lovingly stroked her sister’s hair with one hand as the other, wielding her wand, surreptitiously and silently placed another Imperio over her.

“Yes,” Lucius agreed. “Perhaps we can tell him that Draco helped bring them all in, even if it isn’t true, he may show him mercy.”

“Oi!” called Scabior. “We can’t be forgetting who actually brought them in.”

“Shut up,” Bellatrix snapped. “Call him.”

Lucius began to roll up his sleeve. Draco’s blood thundered through his veins. The Dark Lord would come and they would all die. He couldn’t see any way around it. He looked at Hermione. She was staring back at him, her eyes wild with terror. He could feel his heart pounding in his chest, as if it were trying to get in as many beats as possible before his untimely death.

“Wait!” Bellatrix shrieked abruptly, looking at the snatcher with panic. “Don’t call him. He’ll kill us all.” Lucius paused as Bellatrix ran over to the snatcher. “Where did you get that?” She pointed to the sword of Gryffindor, her voice shaking in horror.

“It was in their tent when we searched them. Finders keepers.”

Bellatrix’s attack was swift and manic. Scabior was stunned and the other two snatchers tripped over themselves as they ran away. The sword of Gryffindor clattered to the ground.

Bellatrix rounded on the four of them. “Where did you get that sword?” Her eyes were insane with rage and terror.

They all remained silent.

“Fine, we’ll have to interrogate them one by one. Starting with the Mudblood.” She flicked her wand, releasing Hermione’s binds and pulled her roughly by the hair away from the others. Hermione cried out in pain, her legs kicking to try to get away from the deranged witch.

“No!” Draco protested. On his other side, Ron was struggling against his restraints too.

Bellatrix rounded on him, releasing Hermione roughly. She fell to the ground in a heap; her brown eyes finding Draco’s silver ones, silently pleading with him to save her somehow. “Problem, Draco?” Bellatrix looked between Draco and Hermione and her lips curled into a vicious snarl. “Ah, I see. Grown fond of the Mudblood, have we, Draco? You’re no better than she is, blood traitor.” She leaned down and looked him in the eye. “She’ll be questioned. And you will watch as she, and your other new friends are killed one by one.

“Take the others to the dungeons.” She announced.

“No! Keep your hands off her!” Ron was yelling as they dragged him and Harry away. “Take me instead.”

“If she dies under questioning, you can be next,” spat Bellatrix.

Draco could hear them struggling and shouting all the way to the dungeons.

“Don’t do this, Bella. Please.” Draco begged as she moved to stand over Hermione.

“Draco, don’t tell her anything, no matter what.” Hermione urged.
“Shut up.” Bellatrix flicked her wand at Draco and he found himself gagged. He struggled against his restraints to no avail.

“Where did you get that sword?” Bellatrix asked Hermione in a mockingly sweet voice.

Hermione said nothing.

“Crucio.”

Hermione screamed in agony. Draco flinched at the sound, straining against his restraints with all his might, but could do nothing. Hermione’s body arched into an unnatural position as the pain contorted her spine. He felt sick. He was going to have to watch while Hermione was killed in front of him.

As Hermione’s screams subsided, he could hear Ron’s muffled shouts from below them.

“Where did you get this sword?” Bellatrix repeated slowly.

Hermione was panting, beads of sweat appearing on her brow, and tears creeping out of the corners of her eyes. “We…we found it,” she gasped.

“I don’t believe you,” Bellatrix snarled before hitting her with yet another Cruciatuus curse.

Hermione screamed again, writhing in pain. This one was longer. Probably only a few seconds, but to Draco it felt like several minutes, her scream vibrating through him as if he had been hit with the curse himself.

“Maybe hurting your boyfriend will loosen your tongue.” Bellatrix snarled as she released the curse, removing Draco’s gag.

“No!” Narcissa protested, trying to rush forward, but Lucius held her back.

“Crucio!” Bellatrix shouted before Narcissa could interfere. Pain erupted through Draco’s body. Fire rippled under his skin, his every muscle shredding apart, his bones breaking, a thousand jagged knives stabbing into every inch of him; or at least that’s how it felt. He tried to keep from screaming out, he didn’t want to give her the satisfaction, but he couldn’t hold it back. His screamed ripped from his throat. It echoed through the once grand ballroom of his childhood home. And then the pain was gone, but his could still feel its effects radiating through his body.

“Stop it!” Hermione screamed, tears rolling down her cheeks freely.

“Tell me!”

“We found it! I swear! Please!” Hermione cried.

“This sword is supposed to be in my vault at Gringotts, you lying bitch. Did you break in? What else did you steal?”

“No. We didn’t. I swear!”

Bellatrix hit her with another torturing curse before Draco could protest, and Hermione’s screams filled the ballroom once more.

“It’s a fake!” Draco blurted out.

“What?”
“It’s true,” Hermione bleated feebly. “It’s a forgery, a fake. I swear.”

“Get the Goblin,” snapped Bellatrix.

A few moments later Griphook was ushered up the stairs by Pettigrew and forced to his knees in front of Bellatrix. She began questioning him about the sword, but Draco wasn’t paying attention. Hermione was bleeding. He couldn’t tell where from, but it was pooling beneath her. She seemed to be slipping out of consciousness. “Hermione,” he breathed in horror, straining against his bonds to inch a bit closer to her.

Her eyes couldn’t focus on him. She was trembling uncontrollably. “Draco,” she whimpered, before her eyes closed, and she moved no more.

And there was so much blood.

“Fine, goblin. We can call him now. Greyback, I’m sure the Dark Lord will not deny you the Mudblood if you want her.” Bellatrix was saying.

Draco’s blood ran cold at the thought of Greyback getting his hands on Hermione. He strained against his magical restraints again, his muscles screaming with the effort. If he could just get free, he would rip Greyback limb from limb, wand or no wand.

Meanwhile, Lucius was rolling up his sleeve. He cast an uneasy look at his only son before pressing his finger to the Dark Mark. Draco’s own mark began to burn. The Dark Lord was coming.

Suddenly, Potter and Weasley were rushing into the room. Ron disarmed Bellatrix while Harry shouted “Relashio” to release Draco from his bonds. “Malfoy!” He threw a wand to him and Draco caught it before stunning his father. He disarmed his mother as Harry went after Greyback.

“STOP OR SHE DIES!”

Draco paused. Bellatrix was supporting Hermione, who was still unconscious, and held her silver knife to her throat.

“Drop your wands,” she whispered. “Drop them, or we’ll see exactly how filthy her blood is!”

The three boys were still for a moment.

“I said, drop them!” she screeched. Draco saw her press the blade into Hermione’s throat, drawing a few drops of crimson blood.

“All right!” Harry shouted, dropping the wand. Ron and Draco followed suit and they all raised their hands in surrender. The stinging hex had worn off and Harry’s face was back to normal. There was no mistaking his identity now.

“Cissy, pick them up,” Bellatrix ordered. Draco’s mother rushed forward and picked up Harry and Ron’s wands. She hesitated for a moment in front of Draco her eyes shining with tears, but ultimately picked up his wand as well and retreated back to stand by her unconscious husband. She was fighting the curse, flipping back and forth between her motherly love and blissful ignorance to her horrifying surroundings.

“Good. The Dark Lord is coming, Harry Potter. Your death approaches!”

A cold wave of dread washed over Draco. The burning in his arm was getting more acute. They didn’t have much time.
There was an odd grinding noise from above them. They all looked up just in time to see the great crystal chandelier above them fall. Bellatrix dropped Hermione and threw herself to the side just in time. The chandelier crashed to the floor on top of Hermione and the goblin, who was still clutching the sword of Gryffindor. Crystal shards flew in all directions, cutting them all. Draco and Ron ran to pull Hermione from the wreckage. Harry ran at Narcissa, wrenching the wands from her hands and stunning Greyback.

“You must not harm Harry Potter!” came a tiny shriek. Draco looked over to see a tiny house elf running into the fray.

“How dare you defy your masters?” Bellatrix screeched.

“Dobby has no master. Dobby is a free elf, and Dobby has come to save Harry Potter and his friends!”

Harry wrenched the goblin free from the chandelier and they all grabbed hold of the elf. Draco held tight to Hermione as they all disapparated together. He could feel the tiny elf’s fingers wrapped around his wrist as they were whisked away.

Hermione’s limp form was heavy in his arms, and he could feel her blood soaking his hands.

Chapter End Notes

I know! I know! It's not easy to see the couple we love so much go through such horrors. Let me know what you think. Don't forget to follow me on Tumblr: HGinny25
They slammed to earth and Draco’s knees buckled beneath him. He lowered Hermione gently to the ground. She was pale, horribly pale. Merlin, she looked dead.

Horror gripped him. She couldn’t be. He pressed his fingers to her neck. After a moment of searching, he felt a slow, weak pulse. She was alive. “Hermione, wake up,” he pleaded, shaking her gently.

Ron rushed over to them. “What’s happened? Why is she bleeding?”

“I don’t know. I can’t tell where it’s coming from,” Draco said in a panic.

Two figures were rushing toward them across the beach. Ron stood to greet them. The ginger man looked at Draco with disdain, but Ron merely said, “It’s okay. He’s with us.”

It was the first moment Ron had shown any kind of acceptance of Draco. Draco felt a wave of gratitude for him.

He recognized the blond witch as Fleur Delacour. He didn’t have the energy to try to figure out how she had ended up with a Weasley, not when his Hermione was laying in his arms dying. Fleur rushed forward to examine Hermione. “Bring her inside,” she urged in her thick French accent.

Draco picked her up and hurried inside. Fleur ushered them into a bedroom and he placed Hermione
on the bed. Fleur began to examine Hermione. “What happened to her?”

“She was tortured. Cruciatus Curse.” Draco replied. “Repeatedly. And a chandelier fell on her.”

Fleur eyed the blood that had pooled on the back of her clothes with confusion and went a bit pale.

“Please give me the room,” she said.

“What is it?” Draco asked.

“Is she…?” Ron began, unable to finish the thought.

“No, she is just unconscious. Please let me tend to her properly without you two hovering over me.”

She pushed them from the room and closed the door with a click.

Frustrated, Ron made his way back downstairs. Draco stayed by the door to Hermione’s room, waiting until Fleur was done. He knew it might be hours before he was allowed to see her, but he wanted to be close by the minute Fleur came out of the room. A few moments later, the ginger man walked up the stairs. He walked over to Draco and extended his hand. “Bill Weasley,” he introduced.

“Draco Malfoy.” Draco took hold of his hand before he realized that it was covered in blood. He released Bill quickly. He looked down. Hermione’s blood was covering his shirt.

“Are you hurt?” Bill asked.

“No,” Draco shook his head, his voice wavering slightly. “It…it isn’t my blood.”

Bill nodded. “Do you need anything?”

Draco shook his head.

“You should come downstairs. Have a cup of tea and see to those cuts.” Bill suggested, gesturing to Draco’s face and arms.

Draco looked down. He hadn’t noticed, but he was covered in tiny cuts from the chandelier shards. “I’m fine.” He asserted, “I’m going to stay here.”

“It could be a while,” remarked Bill.

“I’m staying here,” repeated Draco firmly.

“Suit yourself. At least let me mend those cuts for you.”

Draco nodded absently, and Bill set to work on his wounds. When he was done he brought Draco a change of clothes and then he left Draco alone and went back downstairs. Draco went to the washroom briefly to change his clothes and wash Hermione’s blood from his skin. It stained the porcelain sink basin in a gruesome splatter of red. He didn’t have his wand at the moment, so he did his best to wipe it away by hand. He then returned to the hallway to sit down against the wall next to Hermione’s door.

Light was streaming in from the windows when Harry came up the stairs, covered in sand and earth. “How is she?” he asked, sitting across from Draco.

“No idea. She was bleeding.” His voice shook. “She wouldn’t wake up. Fleur’s been with her hours it seems.”
“She’ll be okay, Malfoy.”

Draco nodded to dismiss him, not really believing it. Eager to change the subject, he asked, “Where’s the elf?”

“Dead.” Harry replied, his voice tight.

Draco didn’t respond. He felt a bit sad that the elf had died while trying to save them. It was a noble thing to do. They would all be dead without him.

“Do you have my wand?” Draco asked.

Harry nodded and reached into his pocket. “We managed to get them back from the snatcher before we left. We have a couple more too.” He pulled out a few wands and set them on the floor between him and Draco.

Draco looked at them. He saw his own hawthorn wand, Hermione’s delicate vine wood wand, a dark walnut wand he recognized as Bellatrix’s, a light yew wand he knew to be his mother’s, and two other wands he didn’t recognize. He picked up his own wand and pocketed it. Harry took the others back, tucking them into the beaded bag he had managed to take back from the snatchers as well.

“Thanks,” Draco murmured.

He tried not to imagine what could be happening inside Hermione’s room. It had been too long. The stone of worry in his stomach was getting heavier and heavier with each passing moment. What could be taking so long? Surely if the worst had happened they would have heard by now. Still, it couldn’t be a good thing that it was taking this long. He recalled Bellatrix boasting a great length about once torturing two aurors to insanity from which they never recovered. He felt sick at the thought of his Hermione’s brilliant mind reduced to lunacy.

He had never really worried about Hermione until today. He had been concerned for her life and well being, yes, but he had never worried about her like this. She always seemed so strong; too proud; too self-sufficient to tolerate something like his worry. But when he had seen her at the Manor, lying unconscious, his heart had stopped. She was just so pale and small and vulnerable.

What would he do if Hermione died? She was all he had. He had no friends or family anymore. He was civil with Potter and Weasley, but they were not friends. Hermione had been the glue that held their little quartet together. Without her, Draco was just a reformed Death Eater, a fact that remained unknown to any allies they had outside of this house. She was his redemption, and his entire reason for fighting with the Order.

“If she dies, Potter, I’ll never forgive you,” Draco said flatly.

Harry just nodded. “If she dies, I’ll never forgive myself.”

Suddenly there was a click and the door swung open. Fleur stepped out as Draco scrambled to his feet. “How is she? Can I see her?” He craned his neck to look around her, but he only saw a glimpse of brown curls before Fleur shut the door with a snap.

Fleur looked at Draco uncertainly. “It’s okay,” began Harry. “He and Hermione are together.”

“You are her boyfriend?” Fleur asked in surprise.

“Yeah, something like that.” Draco nodded. It had never occurred to him until that moment that he
and Hermione had never actually used the words boyfriend or girlfriend.

Fleur looked down. “Alright. Then I should talk to you alone.”

“What do you mean? She’s not…” he trailed off, a cold wave of dread washing over him.

“She’s going to be fine.” Fleur reassured him. “There were just some complications.” She ushered him into the next room and closed the door.

“There were a lot of internal injuries from the torture. She had a broken arm from the chandelier. I fixed the broken arm and all of the bleeding, but…” she paused, taking a deep breath.

“What?” Draco asked with dread.

“I’m afraid that Hermione has lost the baby,” Fleur revealed with sympathy.

Draco’s blood was rushing in his ears as Fleur’s words sank in. “Baby?” He repeated absently.

“I did everything I could, but it was too late by the time you all got her here,” she explained.

“Baby?” Draco said again.

Fleur’s mouth hung open. “Oh my…you did not know she was…”

“How is she?” he asked.

“She didn’t tell you,” Fleur breathed.

Draco sank into a chair.

“I am so sorry. I thought you would have known. At any rate, I am incredibly sorry for your loss. I will leave you to your thoughts if you wish.” She turned to leave.

“Wait,” he barked, his voice sounding forced. Fleur turned back to him. “How is she?”

“She’s heartbroken,” Fleur answered honestly. “But she’s not in much physical pain.”

“Can I see her?” he asked.

Fleur nodded. “Of course.”

~*~*~

Hermione’s back was to him when Draco entered the bedroom. She was curled on her side on the bed facing the window, which looked out over the ocean. She looked very small in the large sweater Fleur had given her. Draco guessed that it must have belonged to Bill. She did not look up when he opened the door, so he made his way around the bed to stand before her.

His heart dropped below his feet at the sight of her. She was not crying, but her eyes were rimmed in red and her cheeks were shiny from tears recently shed. She was staring out the window, though she didn’t seem to be seeing anything at all.

“Granger…Hermione,” he choked as he edged closer to her. She blinked, but otherwise showed no sign that she knew he was there. He reached for her hand. “Hermione, are you alright?”

He flinched, instantly regretting his words. What a stupid thing to ask. He would give up his wand
hand to be able to go back and say anything else.

She didn’t react. He couldn’t even be sure she had heard him.

He could barely stand to look at her. Something within her had changed…broken with this loss. Her strength, her fire, was gone now; replaced by emptiness. He would need to ignite her fire again soon, but now was not the time. For now she needed time to process the loss however she needed to.

“Is there anything you need?” he asked softly, gently smoothing his thumb over her hand.

A single tear escaped her eye and rolled down her nose, dripping off the tip without being wiped away. She closed her eyes as if to squeeze any more tears back. She took a shuddering breath before retracting her hand from his, pulling the blankets up under her chin. “I’m tired,” she mumbled, burying her face in the pillow.

Every part of Draco raged to stay with her, but he knew she was dismissing him. She wanted to be left alone, and was clearly not yet ready to share her grief with anyone. He leaned over her and pressed a kiss into her hair before making his way to the door. Just before it closed behind him he heard her soft sobs filling the small bedroom.

He was sure the sound would stay with him forever.

~*~*~

Draco sat alone in the dark kitchen. A bottle of firewhiskey sat between his hands. He had abandoned his glass long ago, opting to drink directly from the bottle, thinking that perhaps drinking himself to death might not be such a bad idea.

He had spent the whole day waiting for Hermione to ask to see him. The house was full of people, but he had never felt so alone. Harry had been in to see Hermione a couple of times, but judging by his reaction when he exited the room, he had had about as much luck in getting her to talk as Draco had. Fleur had been in several times to give her check ups, every time telling Draco and Harry that she was physically okay, but would just need time. Ron had asked many questions, but Draco didn’t to tell him what had really happened to her and refused to let him see her. After dinnertime, many of the house’s occupants had gone to bed, but Draco couldn’t sleep. He had wandered the house before rummaging through the kitchen cabinets and finding the firewhiskey.

The door swung open and Draco lifted his head slowly to see Harry enter the room. Harry halted at the sight of Draco, who, to Harry’s memory, had never looked so disheveled. His usually tame hair was stringy and wild from Draco’s hands dragging through it. His eyes were bloodshot, from crying, exhaustion, or drunkenness, Harry couldn’t tell.

Harry walked over and picked up the bottle to discover it was empty.

“You’re too late, P…Potter,” slurred Draco, his voice raspy with emotion.

“Shame,” Harry grumbled. “I could have used a drink.” He sat down across from Draco.

“Is Hermione…” Draco began.

“She’s sleeping,” replied Harry. “Fleur gave her a Dreamless Sleep Potion a couple hours ago.”

Draco nodded. “Good. She needs to rest.” He looked down at his hands. He and Harry sat in silence for several moments.
Suddenly, Draco sharply gasped in air and began to quietly sob, his hands cradling his forehead and clutching at his hair. His shoulders shook heavily, not caring that Harry was watching him. “Fuck,” he grumbled as he composed himself. “How can I be upset over losing something I never knew I had?”

“You have every right to be upset,” Harry said evenly.

“No, I don’t. Besides, it’s a good thing actually,” Draco said bitterly. “This isn’t the time to have a… a…” He couldn’t say it. “I know it’s probably for the best. I just…when I saw her face after she found out…” More fat tears ran down his face. “I could have done more to keep her safe.”

“There was nothing you could have done. This isn’t your fault, Malfoy,” insisted Harry.

“Maybe if I had known I could have…I don’t know,” Draco mumbled, ignoring Harry’s words.

“She was scared to tell you. She didn’t want to burden you with more worries.”

“Wait, what?” Draco growled, looking up.

“She was going to tell you when the time was right.”

“You knew? She told you?” Draco asked incredulously.

“I figured it out on my own technically, but yes, we talked about it.” Harry admitted.

“You knew and I didn’t? I was the father!” He was yelling now, standing up onto his shaking legs. “Merlin, I was the father and I didn’t even know!”

“Calm down, Malfoy.” Harry urged, standing. He cast a quick silencing spell on the kitchen, not wanting Draco’s yelling to wake up the whole house.

“Calm down? The woman I love got pregnant with my baby and she told you and not me!” He picked up the empty bottle and hurled it against the wall.

Harry flinched as the bottle shattered. He stared at Draco, stunned that he had just said ‘love.’

“You,” Draco said darkly, pointing his wand at Harry. “You should have told me.”

“It wasn’t my business to tell,” Harry said, keeping his hand on his own wand.

“Then you should have told her to tell me!” Draco roared.

“I did, Malfoy. I did! Now calm down and lower your wand,” Harry pressed.

“STOP TELLING ME TO CALM DOWN!” Draco roared. “My child is gone. I’ll shout as much as I bloody well want to!”

“You’re drunk, Malfoy. Lower your wand. Go to bed,” Harry said calmly.

Harry’s words seemed to remind Draco of the existence of alcohol, for he turned and began rummaging through cabinets. “Not bloody tired,” he mumbled. He emerged with a fresh bottle of firewhiskey. With shaking hands, he uncorked it, ready to drink himself to oblivion.

“Stop, Malfoy,” Harry barked, crossing the room and attempting to tear the bottle from Draco’s hands. “You’ve had enough.”
“Piss off,” Draco grumbled, fighting to get his lips around the bottle, but he was drunk enough that Harry overpowered him easily, grabbing the bottle and sending Draco stumbling backwards into the table. He whipped out his wand and shot a stinging hex at Harry. It missed him narrowly, and Harry had enough time while Draco was taking a breath for another try to shout “Expelliarmus!”

Draco’s wand soared into Harry’s hand.

“Give me my wand, Potter,” Draco slurred.

“Not until you’ve calmed down and sobered up,” Harry insisted.

Draco pulled his fist back and launched forward to punch Harry, but lost his balance as he swung and he fell to the floor hard. Once down, Draco rested his head on the floor and cried. Harry pocketed the wands and set down the firewhiskey.

“Come on,” Harry sighed. He hoisted Draco up by his arms and helped the crying man to the couch.

Draco flopped onto it. Harry turned to leave. “Potter,” Draco said urgently, his pale fingers closing around Harry’s wrist before he could walk away. “I…I’m not a bloody spy. I was just trying to…”

Harry shook his head. “I know, mate. Don’t worry about that. Just get some sleep.”

Draco dropped his hand and rested his head upon the pillow. He stared absently out of the open window at the crescent moon. After a moment, he closed his eyes. Harry couldn’t tell if it was from exhaustion or emotion, but he walked away from the grieving man and to his own bedroom.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Please let me know what you think! I know it was a very emotional chapter. I hope I haven’t sent anyone spiraling into misery. Thanks for reading! And thank you to those of you who have and will take the time to review. It means so much to me to hear your feedback!

Follow me on Tumblr (HGINNY25) for updates on this story, personal ramblings about my writing, funny asks, and teasers for upcoming stories.
Grief

Chapter Notes

Another WARNING for this chapter. If you are waiting to continue reading this story after the emotional discussions of Hermione's miscarriage have passed, wait until the next chapter, as it will still be discussed very heavily in this chapter.

I was so overwhelmed by the outpouring of support and love the last chapter got. After being so nervous to post it, I was so relieved to receive so many reviews and positive comments on it. Thank you all so much. It means so much to me. I know it is a very difficult subject, but I can only hope that I write it in a way that is beautiful and somewhat cathartic. I hope you like this chapter as much as you liked the last one.

Hermione woke up the next morning with a horrible feeling of emptiness. Her arms reached out for Draco, but found only cold, empty sheets. Her heart sank, remembering how dismissive she had been with him yesterday. She rolled over to look around the room, wondering if she would find him elsewhere. Instead, her eyes fell upon Harry, dozing in a chair in the corner.

She sat up slowly, her aching muscles groaning in protest. She whimpered, the after effects of multiple Crucius Curses and a miscarriage sending shocks of pain through her core.

Harry’s eyes fluttered open and he took in the sight of her. “Hey, you shouldn’t be up,” he urged. “Lie back down.” He stood from the chair and walked over to her, his hands going to her shoulders to gently keep her from standing. “How do you feel?”

Hermione waved his hands away, but did not try to stand up. “Where’s Draco?” She ignored his question, her voice hoarse from an evening of crying.

“Downstairs,” Harry replied, pulling the chair closer and sitting down. “Probably still out cold on the couch. He was in a right state last night.”

Guilt gripped Hermione. Would her lies, and the loss of their child hang between them forever? “He knows about the baby?” she asked, knowing the answer already.

Harry nodded. “He isn’t mad at you, Mione,” Harry commented, as if reading her thoughts. “He’s just mourning. Got into Bill’s stash of Firewhiskey unfortunately. He’d finished off an entire bottle by the time I found him. He was pretty mad at me when he found out I knew and he didn’t, but he wasn’t upset with you at all.”

Hermione nodded slowly, her head swimming. She grimaced and rubbed her temples.

“You should lie back down,” said Harry.

Hermione eased herself back against her pillows and pulled the blankets up to cover herself.

“Then do you want Malfoy to come up?”

Tears filled Hermione’s eyes again and she shook her head.
Harry bit the inside of his cheek briefly. “I know you’ve been through a lot. I can’t even imagine how you must be feeling right now, and I’m so sorry for everything. I just want to remind you that you’re not the only one who lost something yesterday.”

He stood, placing a hand on her head gently as a couple tears escaped her eyes. He stroked her hair and kissed the top of her head before leaving the room.

~*~*~

There was an ice pick in his skull. Draco was sure that could be the only explanation for the acute pain behind his eyes. He winced against the evil sun’s rays as he struggled to open his eyes. A girl was standing very close to him, her face close to his. He groaned and reeled backwards, his eyes straining to focus. He recognized her. She was the loony Ravenclaw girl; he couldn’t remember her name at the moment, not when the ice pick in his skull was stabbing deeper.

“You’ve got more wrackspurts in your head than anyone I’ve ever seen,” the girl commented dreamily.

He didn’t have the energy to ask what the hell a wrackspurt was. He was primarily focused on not vomiting all over her shoes.

“Leave him be, Luna,” called a voice from the kitchen. “He had a rough night.”

Bill Weasley came into view with a glass of water and a phial of potion. He handed both to Draco with a slight smile. “Hangover potion,” he said.

“Thanks,” Draco mumbled, downing the potion in one gulp and chasing it with the water. After just a couple of minutes his nausea and headache subsided. He didn’t feel back to normal, but it was a vast improvement. “Sorry I drank all your whiskey. I’d love to replace it for you, but I’m afraid I’m quite poor now that I’m probably officially disinherited.”

Bill smiled sympathetically and waved him off. “Don’t mention it. I have more around here somewhere. I’ll be hiding it very well from now on though. Feel like eating?”

Draco then noticed the smell of bacon wafting in from the kitchen. His stomach grumbled and he nodded absently. “Is Hermione up yet?” he asked as he stood and carefully walked to the kitchen.

“Haven’t heard from her. My guess is she’s still asleep. You can head up there after you eat something,” Bill replied, following him to sit at the table.

Fleur set down a plate in front of him and Draco tucked in ravenously. He couldn’t remember the last time he had eaten a home cooked meal. He barely got to enjoy it though, before Harry walked into the kitchen.

“Hermione’s awake,” Harry said, joining them at the table and helping himself to some toast.

“How is she?” Ron asked through a mouthful of toast.

“Couldn’t get her to say much,” Harry frowned. “She still seems pretty broken up about everything.”

Draco stood, nearly falling over as his head spun from the sudden change in altitude. Before anyone could protest, he hurried out of the kitchen and up the stairs. He paused outside Hermione’s door, careful not to burst in and give her a fright. He knocked gently before pushing the door open slowly.

The shades had been drawn, but he could make out her outline still lying on the bed. He approached
her and sat on the edge of the bed. She opened her eyes. “Hi,” she murmured.

“Hey,” he breathed, reaching out to stroke her hair. “Fleur cooked breakfast. Do you want me to bring you something?”

Hermione closed her eyes and shook her head. “I’m so tired.”

“You haven’t eaten in two days, love. You should have some food.”

“I’m not hungry,” she insisted.

Draco wanted to push harder. She was already so thin; she shouldn’t be denying a good meal when it was available for her.

“Hermione,” he sighed. “I’m so sorry about—“

“I’m going back to sleep,” she cut him off. She rolled away from him and closing her eyes.

He sat for a moment, hoping that she would turn back and talk to him. He wanted to talk to her about everything, but she wasn’t ready. Pushing his feelings down as far as he could, he exited the room again.

“What really happened to her?” Weasley asked when Draco descended the stairs.

“She was tortured, Weasley,” Draco barked.

“So were you. You seem fine,” Weasley pointed out.

Draco rounded on the redhead. “Yeah, once. She was tortured at least three times. And you’re crazy if you think Bellatrix didn’t hit her harder than she hit me.”

Ron grimaced, averting his eyes from the blonde.

“She’ll be fine,” Draco insisted, lowering his voice. “Just give her some time.”

He brushed past Ron to head back to the kitchen.

“Your family really is shit, Malfoy.” Ron grumbled.

Draco’s stomach twisted painfully. “Yeah—“ he agreed bitterly, “I know.”

~*~*~

Draco sat up from the couch and checked his watch. It was nearly midnight. He had considered going upstairs to be with Hermione, but she clearly still wanted to be alone, so he had lain down on the couch for another fitful night of sleep. After perhaps just an hour of sleep he had been roused. He couldn’t be sure if it was a noise or just a feeling that had woken him, but he was suddenly alert.

Looking around the living room, he determined that nothing was obviously amiss, but he was thirsty. He stood up and stumbled into the kitchen to get a glass of water. As he quenched his thirst he looked through the window out at the beach. His heart leapt when he saw Hermione standing outside. He could barely make out her silhouette in the moonlight, but there was no mistaking her mass of brown curls.

He set down his glass and walked out the kitchen door.
She was standing in the surf up to her ankles. She had rolled her jeans up to her knees and had her sweater pulled tightly around her. He took a moment to remove his shoes and socks before approaching her. She didn’t look or speak to him when he stopped next to her, but her hand found his and she grasped it tightly. He squeezed back, desperate to feel her warmth again.

“You shouldn’t be out here. It’s cold,” he commented as the frigid water washed over his feet.

“I’ll talk to you about it now,” she said suddenly, her voice heavy with barely restrained emotion. “For five minutes. And after that, I don’t want to talk about it again…for a very long time…maybe ever.”

Draco swallowed. “Okay,” he murmured.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you that I was pregnant,” she said abruptly. Her tone was clipped, almost mechanical. She was forcing the words out while she could, before her misery overtook her again. “I don’t have any explanation for it other than that I was scared. Scared of the whole thing, scared of what I should do about it, scared of what you would say or do. I should have told you, and I’m really sorry.”

Draco nodded. He opened his mouth to reply, but she pressed on.

“I shouldn’t have pushed you away. I don’t know how to react to something like this. I just wanted to be alone and I wanted it to all go away: the pain, my guilt, everything. But Harry reminded me that you lost something too. You didn’t deserve to be pushed out like that. I’m sorry.

“And I feel terrible about the whole thing, not only because I lost it, but because when Fleur told me, I felt…relieved.” Her voice broke at the confession.

He glanced sideways at her to see that she was crying now. Her bottom lip trembled and fat tears were rolling down her cheeks.

“And I know that it’s for the best. Having a baby right now would be the stupidest thing we could do. I’m not ready, we’re not ready, and this damn war…but that doesn’t stop me from feeling so guilty for being relieved.” She used her free hand to wipe her tears away. “Do you have anything to say?” she asked.

Draco thought for a second. He had so many things he wanted to say, but right now he only cared about one thing. “How do you feel?”

For the first time since he came to stand next to her, she looked at him. Her eyes were a beautiful and terrible mixture of gratitude and pain. “I feel…empty. I miss it, as weird as that sounds. When I first found out I was pregnant it felt like there was this intruder inside me who was trying to dictate my whole life. After a while though, I started to picture it a little bit differently. I started to imagine this child…” she paused, dropping her eyes from his as if too embarrassed to see his reaction to her words. “A child with blonde hair and your eyes and my nose. I could imagine this whole life for the child and for me and you, and now it’s just gone. I don’t know; it’s stupid.”

“It’s not stupid,” insisted Draco, squeezing tighter to her hand. He cleared his throat to try to chase away the tears that threatened to fall.

She wiped away a tear. “And I feel sort of…broken. Like I’m damaged now.”

“No,” Draco said quickly, hoping to interrupt this toxic thought before she could accept it as part of her new identity. “Listen to me very carefully. You are not broken. You’re a warrior. You’re just wounded. But you’ll recover from this and come back stronger and more fierce than ever.”
She didn’t smile, but held her head a little higher and squeezed his hand a little harder. They stood for a couple of minutes, just listening to the sound of the ocean.

“Are you okay?” she asked, looking up at him.

Draco felt a wave of affection for the witch next to him. He pulled her into him and held her face in his hands. He kissed her deeply. “I will be.”

~*~*~

Draco held Hermione in bed for several hours, his grief rolling and swirling within him like a stormy sea. The longer he sat there, the more his misery became tethered to a heavy anchor of guilt. This had all been his fault. He had been the one to get Hermione pregnant, and it had been his family that had tortured her. He thought of Bellatrix, her eyes wild with insane glee as she fixed her wand on Hermione. Merlin, he didn’t think he would ever get the sound of Hermione’s screams out of his mind. He could hear them now almost as if she were screaming next to him.

He closed his eyes, eager to fall asleep and stop the constant replay of yesterday’s events going through his mind.

Just as he started to drift off, he saw Bellatrix looming over him and jolted awake. He looked around the room, but it was dark and empty. It had really felt like she had been there too, but it was just a dream. He glanced over at Hermione, worried that his jump had woken her up, but she was still fast asleep. However, she did not look peaceful. Her brow was slightly furrowed and her eyes were darting around rapidly beneath her lids. She flinched slightly in her sleep, and then groaned quietly.

He didn’t want to wake her, but she was clearly having a nightmare. He did his best to soothe her without waking her. He stroked her hair gently and pulled her closer to his chest. After several moments, she stilled with a deep breath.

Fleur had said it would take a few days before she felt like herself again, but he wondered how long it would be before they had both recovered from what they had lost. Or if they ever would.

~*~*~

The following morning, Draco woke up alone in the bed. He sat up to see Hermione pulling on her jumper and some socks. “I’m starving,” she announced when she saw that he was awake.

“Allright,” he yawned, rubbing his face. “Want me to go get you something?”

“No, I think…I think I’d like to get out of this room. Show everyone I’m still alive, you know?” She looked nervous, but determined.

“You’re sure?” he asked, getting out of bed.

She nodded, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth briefly. He approached her and took her face in his hands. Her eyes found his and although they were still red and puffy, there was something resembling courage behind them again. Or, if not quite courage, at least fierce determination. What she was determined to do, he couldn’t know, but he was happy to see something there other than the emptiness he saw yesterday.

He kissed her gently for a moment before pulling away and kissing her forehead. She took a shaky breath and he watched as her face fell into a mask of indifference.

“Let’s go,” Draco said softly, grabbing hold of her hand and ushering her to the door.
As they descended the stairs into the kitchen, several sets of eyes found her. Aside from Draco, the only people who knew the truth about Hermione’s condition were Harry and Fleur. The rest were just told that she had lingering symptoms of the multiple Cruciatus curses she endured.

Ron stood up abruptly. “Hey, how are you? How do you feel?”

“Let the woman breathe, Ron,” Harry joked, moving over a chair so that Hermione and Draco could sit down next to each other.

“I’m a little sore, but I’m okay,” Hermione said meekly as she sat down.

Fleur set a plate of toast, jam, bacon and eggs in front of Hermione and Draco each. Draco tucked in ravenously, but Hermione just picked up a bit of toast and nibbled on it tentatively.

“Still not much appetite,” she smiled weakly to the table of people. Her eyes settled on the boy sitting across from her. “Dean, hi. I didn’t know you were here.”

Draco looked at the boy across from them. He’d been reintroduced to Dean Thomas yesterday, but they hadn’t spoken much.

“Luna and I were being held at the Manor,” Dean answered. “Dobby brought us here along with Mr. Ollivander before he brought you and the others.”

“Where is Dobby?” Hermione asked, turning to Harry.

Harry’s eyes dropped to his eggs. “He died. I buried him out back,” he said stiffly.

“Oh,” Hermione squeaked, trembling slightly. Draco could tell she was close to tears. He quickly grabbed hold of her hand under the table.

The others at the table fell into conversation about Ollivander, Griphook, and the rest of the Order. Draco could tell that Hermione was doing her best to soak up as much information as she could, but that she was distracted. At least she was out of bed and talking to people. She did her best to chat politely with Dean and Luna, catching up on their adventures since last June. They were very interested to hear about her life as well. They both had assumed that she was dead until Harry informed them otherwise at the Manor.

They were surprised, but not upset, when they heard of her romantic involvement with Draco. Their quick acceptance of the couple surprised Draco. Potter and Weasley’s reactions had been reluctant at best, and explosive at worst. He had just assumed that they would face such vicious opposition from most people they told. But perhaps most people would just shrug and be confused, and then apathetic.

Suddenly, there was a pounding on the front door and Bill jumped up. He pulled his wand and approached the door cautiously.

A few moments later, he returned, a beaming Remus Lupin in tow.

“I came as soon as I heard from Bill that you were all here,” he announced. His amber eyes swept across the table and settled on Hermione and Draco. “I must say, I’m shocked to see all of you sharing a table so peacefully, but I’m thrilled to see you alive.” He walked up to Draco and extended his hand.

Hesitantly, Draco stood to look his former professor in the eye and shook his hand.
“Welcome to the Order, Draco,” said Remus with a smile.

“Oh, I…I’m not—” Draco stammered.

Remus laughed. “I know that.” He released the blonde’s hand and gestured to the trio of Gryffindors at the table. “But they aren’t either and I suspect the fate of the war may rest in their very unqualified hands. If you’re with them, then you’re on our side.”

“With all due respect, sir, I’m first and foremost on her side,” Draco said, nodding towards Hermione. He sank back into his chair and took hold of Hermione’s hand again.

Remus raised an eyebrow. “Indeed?” He looked from Draco to Hermione, who was blushing profusely and smiling behind her hand. “Well I’m so pleased to see you all alive and well.”

“Would you like any breakfast, Remus?” Fleur offered.

“No, I can’t stay,” said Remus. “Thank you. I’ve got to get back. Thank you. I’ve got to get back. Just wanted to stop by and tell you all that Tonks has had the baby!”

There was a general sigh of happiness around the table and everyone immediately began to offer their congratulations, but Hermione flinched. She clung a bit tighter to Draco’s hand.

Draco felt like he had been punched in the gut. It was suddenly very hard to breathe. He could only imagine how Hermione must be feeling now. It broke his heart to watch the array of emotions on her face.

In just a few seconds, she went from obvious shock and pain, to blinking away tears, to putting on a mask of joy as she stood to wrap her arms around her professor in a congratulatory hug. “Congratulations,” she said, wiping away tears.

Lupin must have assumed her tears were from joy, for he didn’t seem at all phased. After accepting hugs and handshakes from the rest of the group, he turned to Harry. “You’ll be godfather, yeah?”


Lupin beamed. “Yeah, who else?”

Harry looked touched. “Well, yeah! Of course I will.”

Remus hugged Harry, patting his back a couple of times before pulling away and grinning broadly at the others. “Well I’d best get back. Must help my lovely wife with little Teddy. Stay safe, you lot.”

With that, he swept out of the kitchen and out the front door. He got to the edge of the wards before disapparating with a pop.

The table fell into excited conversation about Remus and Tonks’ baby. Still Draco held tight to Hermione’s hand. On her other side, Draco could see that Harry had a hand on her knee in a gesture of support. He made brief eye contact with the Chosen One before turning back to his eggs.

Hermione pushed the food around on her plate a bit, every now and then bringing her fork to her lips to take a tiny bite. After a few minutes of listening to the others and pretending to eat, she stood. “Sorry everyone, but I think I have to go back to bed,” she announced. She sounded surprisingly cheerful, but Draco could see the cracks forming in her façade.

“Are you alright?” Harry asked with concern.
Hermione nodded. “Yes, just a small headache. Too much excitement all at once I think. Thank you for breakfast, Fleur. I’ll try to eat a bit more later.”

Before Draco could protest, she retreated up the stairs and the bedroom door closed with a soft click.

When Draco entered the room a few moments later, having finished his breakfast and cleared his and Hermione’s plates, Hermione was crying softly in bed.

He closed the door, removed his shoes, and climbed in next to her. She turned to bury her face in his chest and let herself cry freely. And he held her as his own tears dripped off the end of his nose.

Chapter End Notes

I know it's another shorter chapter. I didn't want to make it too long since it's so emotional. Don't worry, our heroes will begin to heal soon. The angst won't last forever. There's still a war going on after all! Thanks for reading! Let me know what you think. I read every single review I get and they all mean so much to me. Y'all keep me going!

Don't forget to follow me on Tumblr: HGinny25 for updates and sneak peeks. I have so few followers and I would love to have more!
Chapter Notes

Okay, so if you've been skipping chapters to avoid triggers, then I think this is the chapter that you should pick back up with. The miscarriage is still mentioned, but this chapter is FAR less centered on that than the past two chapters. There will still be sad moments, but I think you'll all be able to handle it. This chapter focuses on our heroes moving forward, looking to the other pressing events in their lives (like the war), and growing their relationship with each other.

If you've skipped the past two chapters, here are the important points that you missed:

- Draco got drunk and tried to hex Harry, causing Harry to disarm him.
- Only Hermione, Harry, Draco, and Fleur know about Hermione's miscarriage.
- Dean and Luna are also at Shell Cottage and they were surprisingly fine with Draco and Hermione dating.
- Remus stopped by to announce the birth of Teddy.

And here we go with Chapter 19!

With each passing day, Hermione grew a bit stronger. Whether she was beginning to heal, or was just getting better at hiding her grief, Draco didn’t know. But he suspected that it was a bit of both. After a week, she was eating full meals again. They were small, but it was something. She spent her days talking with Luna and Dean; and when she tired of socializing, she would sit out by the shore alone and feel the sun on her face and the sand in her toes.

Draco had stopped trying to discuss their loss with her. He’d tried a couple of times, to which she always replied, “I told you I don’t want to talk about it anymore, at least not now.” For now, that’s what she needed. It wasn’t denial exactly; more like acknowledgement that there were simply too many other things going on to wallow in her own misery for too long.

Even so, she still cried in the night. She still had nightmares that woke her up gasping in a cold sweat.

“I just don’t know how to help her,” Draco said to Harry a week after their arrival at Shell Cottage. Hermione was sitting out on the beach alone, her knees drawn up to her chest as she looked out over the rolling waves.

“You are helping her,” Harry replied.

“She won’t talk to me about it. She just cries. And when she’s not crying she’s just staring off into space.” He gestured to Hermione through the kitchen window.

“She just needs time. You both do.”
Draco clenched his jaw and nodded, his silver eyes fixed on the frail girl sitting in the sand. “I wish I could send her forward in time to the moment when she feels better.”

Harry cocked his head to the side thoughtfully. “I don’t think there will be one moment. She’ll be better some days and worse others. That’s how it works with grief. Right now there are more bad days than good, but one day there will be more good than bad. Eventually there will be so many good days; it will feel like you’re both healed. But you don’t really ever get over your grief. It will always be a part of both of you.”

Draco frowned and turned away from the window. “Thanks for the words of wisdom,” he grumbled as he walked away.

And the days dragged on. Harry had been right, of course. Some days were better than others. Some days she smiled, they talked on the porch about trivial things, she smiled while Harry and Ron made jokes, and she seemed happy. Other days she hardly left her room.

It had been perhaps 10 days since they arrived here when Draco first began to worry about something other than Hermione. He couldn’t find his wand. He recalled getting it back from Harry just after they escaped, but had since misplaced it. He hadn’t needed it for several days, but eventually he’d begun to feel a bit like one of his limbs was missing.

“I’m sure it will turn up,” Hermione assured him as he rummaged through her bag, pulling out dozens of items and letting them drop to the floor.

He just grumbled something incoherent and thrust his arm into the bag up to his shoulder, feeling past books and clothes for anything that resembled wood.

“This is ridiculous,” he groaned, letting the bag drop into a chair with a deep thud.

“Well, when was the last time you saw it?”

Draco rubbed his temples, thinking hard. “The day we got here. Potter gave it to me and I swear I put it in my pocket.” He thrust his hands into his pockets as if to remember the action. He paced around the room for a moment before he groaned, suddenly recalling the drunken brawl between himself and Potter that night. He’d forgotten until now, but he’d tried to hex Harry, and had been disarmed in retaliation. “Shit,” he murmured, heading for the door.

He found Harry in the kitchen. “Potter, give me my wand.”

“Your wand?” Harry parroted.

“Yes, my wand. You took it that night I... I need it back.”

Harry frowned and reached into his pocket. He pulled out Draco’s wand. There it was: Hawthorn, ten inches. Draco practically leapt across the table to get it back, but instead just held out his hand expectantly.

Harry held the wand in his hands for a moment, as if he didn’t want to give it up. With a sigh, he ultimately held the wand out, allowing Draco to wrap his fingers around it.

Draco expected to feel the usual surge of magic rear back to life, but instead felt nothing. Deciding not to dwell on it, he just put the wand in his pocket, nodded at Harry in thanks, and turned to leave the kitchen.

~*~*~
For several days, Draco noticed the signs of their planning. Potter and Weasley were always speaking in hushed tones and having discussions in the Goblin’s bedroom at all hours of the day and night. As far as he knew, they had not yet included Hermione in their plans, but he knew it was only a matter of time. Somewhere outside of this tiny haven of a home, there was a war raging. One day in early April, Harry entered into Draco and Hermione’s room.

“Can I talk to you two?” he asked.

Draco stood. “Actually I’d like a word first, Potter.” He beckoned the Gryffindor boy into the next room. Potter hesitated, but ultimately followed.

Draco closed the door and rounded on Harry. “I don’t know what you’re planning, but I want her kept out of it,” Draco said firmly, putting his hands in his pockets.

Harry stared at him, his mouth opening and closing as he searched for the words.

“She almost died, Potter. She lost something she can’t get back. I can’t let her go back out there and risk it all again,” Draco declared.

“I’m not going to force her into anything. But she should be allowed to make her own decision about it,” Harry countered calmly.

Draco shook his head. “Leave us out of it. Go on your suicide missions if you must. We found a safe place. I intend to stay here a long as we can, and I intend for her to stay too.”

Harry’s eyes narrowed in confusion. “What’s your goal in this war, Malfoy?” he asked.

“Survival,” said Draco at once. “For myself and for her.”

“Why did you ever agree to help her hunt horcruxes then?” asked Harry.

“If killing You-Know-Who is going to help me survive this war, then it seemed like the right way to go,” Draco said with a shrug.

“And now? We still have more horcruxes to hunt. I know where one is and how we can get it. You would abandon the cause now?”

“Like I said, we found a safe place. I could get behind the hunt when we were on the run. We were in danger anyways. But I’m perfectly content to stay here until the end of the war.”

“Hermione still deserves to know where Ron and I are going. She deserves to have the choice.”

“If you tell her, she’ll go with you. You know she will.”

“Then you need to accept that you’ve chosen to be with someone whose motivations are very different than your own,” Harry shrugged.

“You think she wants to die?” Draco scoffed.

“Of course not, but here’s what I know, what my parents knew, and what Hermione knows. There are things worth dying for, and this war is one of them. You-Know-Who and the Death Eaters want to kill you and me, yes; but they’re trying to take away Hermione’s rights as a witch, her right to be who she is, to even be a part of the only world she knows anymore. She fights because she’s my friend, yes; but she fights more because she has to. Because she knows that if she doesn’t, she might not get another chance. And she would die for that right.”
Draco dropped his eyes, his heart sinking. Once again he was reminded of the fierceness of Potter’s friendship with Hermione. Potter was right, of course. Hermione had more reason to fight in this war than practically anyone he knew.

“In our first year, Hermione, Ron and I nearly got eaten by a three-headed dog in the castle. We were out after curfew and were running from Filch when we came across it. Once we were back in the common room Hermione yelled at us. She was angry that we nearly got her killed, but she said that getting expelled would have been even worse.

“For a long time I thought that was so weird, that Hermione cared so much about school that she would rather die than be expelled, but a couple years ago I realized that it was because she would rather die than have this part of her life taken away from her.

“So yeah, you could keep her here until the end of the war, and she would be safe. But she would never be happy knowing that there were people out there dying for her rights. She’s a Gryffindor, Malfoy. She’s got that reckless bravery that you love to mock so much. She’s got it as much as I do. I want her to be safe too, but I’ve never been able to keep her from walking by my side into danger. Don’t think for a second you’ll be able to stop her either.”

Slowly, as if waiting for Draco to stop him, Harry walked past the blond man and out of the room. Draco trailed after him, his shoulders slumped. He sat down in the chair in Hermione’s room as Potter explained what he wanted to do. The words washed over him, not really sinking in until Potter got to the point of the story.

“So I’m sure you’ve realized that the only option…is to break into the Lestrange vault at Gringotts,” Harry announced hesitantly.

“What?” Draco bit sharply.

“Yes, of course. It needs to be done,” Hermione was saying from the bed.

“Ron and I have a rough plan, but we’ll need your help with some of the details,” Harry said to her.

“Stop,” Draco barked, standing up. “This is your big plan? Do you have any idea how stupid it would be to try to break into Gringotts? Any vault would be hard, but I happen to know where the Lestrange vault is. It’s in the high-security wing, near my family’s vault. It’s miles underground in a labyrinth of corridors protected by dozens of enchantments and spells. Not to mention…”

“That’s why we could really use your help, Malfoy. Griphook has agreed to help us too, but your knowledge of the high-security vaults will be really valuable especially if we run into trouble,” Harry said.

Draco was a breath away from telling Harry that he refused to go with him on his suicide mission, but he glanced at Hermione first. There was no fear or hesitation behind her eyes. She had already made up her mind. She was going with Potter on his stupid death march. Damn her and her Gryffindor loyalty. He knew that if she was going, there was nothing in the world that would stop him from going with her.

He scoffed and laughed darkly. “You really do have a death wish, Potter. What’s the plan?”

~*~*~*~*~

She was doing much better, Draco noticed as Hermione walked around her bedroom gathering up her scattered items and organizing them into her beaded bag. A month had passed since their escape from Malfoy Manor, and he could tell that she was restless from being cooped up for so long. She
still held sadness behind her eyes, but she hadn’t spoken of her loss since the day after the events at the Manor. Neither of them was sleeping well these days, as evidence to her reorganization of her belongings at midnight. He sat up in bed, resting against the headboard, his silver eyes surveying her as she sat on the floor surrounded by the contents of her beaded bag. She was wearing only an oversized sweater and warm woolen socks, having found her jeans too restrictive for sitting on the floor. Physically, she was completely healed, and Draco knew that meant they would be leaving on their next dangerous mission very soon.

“Can you hand me that book next to you, please?” she asked softly.

Draco blinked and looked at the table next to him. He picked up the book and handed it to her, hardly looking at her. He couldn’t stop thinking about the Gringotts break in. Having sat in on the planning meetings and assisted with the plans, he knew exactly how slim their chances of success, let alone survival were.

He had given up on his hopes of Hermione staying behind. He knew, though it sat within him bitterly, that Hermione would gladly lay down her life for Potter’s. She would walk beside him with her head held high to the very ends of the earth. He loved that about her, but it killed him that she would go into battle for Potter, but she wouldn’t stay behind for him. He knew that he had something with Hermione that Potter would never have, but Potter had a lot with her that Draco didn’t. He envied the closeness of their relationship, the history they shared, and her unwavering, undying trust in him.

Despite their progress, he could never erase their past. She had forgiven him and they had moved on, but it couldn’t be erased. Despite her forgiveness, the guilt he felt still sat heavy on his heart.

“I—” Hermione squeaked suddenly. Draco looked up at her. She was biting her lip nervously and wouldn’t look at him. She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “I love you, you know.”

Draco blinked, his heart hammering in his chest.

She glanced at him, noticing his wide eyes. She blushed crimson and looked away again. “You don’t have to say it back,” she said quickly. “You don’t have to say anything at all. I just…we almost died. And when we were there, I really thought I was going to die, and all I could think about was all of the things that I hadn’t told you. And this isn’t just something I want to say because we’re about to do something really dangerous. I’ve just been feeling it for a while now, and I wanted you to know.”

Something beautiful and powerful took flight in Draco’s chest. She loved him. For some reason he may never understand, in spite of everything he had done and everything he was, this amazing witch loved him.

He felt it. Merlin knew he felt it. Strong, persistent, true. He wanted to tell her, but he had never said those words to anyone before. There was no turning back from saying those words, especially to her. She was everything he was never supposed to love. He was supposed to despise her, and perhaps he had once. And yet here they sat, together, after everything they had been through, after a lifetime of the world doing everything it could to keep them apart. “Granger…Hermione, I…you know I…” he trailed off, his words failing him.

Hermione stood and smiled, “I know.” She leaned in and kissed him tenderly, and he had never been so grateful for her compassion. He took her into his arms and pulled her onto the bed with him. He moved to hold her close and cradle her tiny body, but she swung one leg over his lap to straddle him. She deepened the kiss, her hands going to the sides of his face.

Draco pulled back in surprise. They hadn’t been intimate since before the Manor. “Are you sure
you’re up for this, love?”

Hermione bit her lip nervously and nodded. “I did some reading. Everything I found said it’s perfectly safe after two to three weeks.”

She leaned back in to kiss him again, but he turned his head away briefly. “Okay, it’s safe…but are you ready for this?” he asked, taking her face in his hands.

Hermione closed her eyes and nodded. “I am. I promise.” When she opened her eyes, it was clear that she was close to tears. She blinked them away, a fierce determination settling on her face.

And then she kissed him with so much confidence, that he could never doubt her again.

Her fingers delved under the bottom of his shirt, making him jump slightly at her cold fingers.

“Sorry,” she murmured against his lips.

He grinned. “Don’t apologize.” He settled his hands on her hips as she gently rolled them against him.

His body began to respond, as if waking up from a long sleep. He grew hard quickly and gripped her hips tighter as she began to pull his shirt up and over his head. Her cold hands palmed his pale chest as her tongue darted past her teeth, teasing his lips gently.

He moved one hand up to the nape of her neck, drawing her closer, deepening the kiss urgently. The fingers of his other hand inched up her bare legs and under her sweater. She was thin, he could feel her ribcage beneath her skin, but her full breasts brushed against his chest. He sat up straighter, wrapping his arm around her to pull her against him.

She gasped as he detached his mouth from hers to drag his lips down the creamy column of her neck. His hands were strong and sure as they ran up her torso, lifting her sweater over her head.

He used both hands to smooth her hair away from her face. Her eyes met his, and they were a beautiful mixture of adoration and sorrow. He paused briefly, her grief causing him to hesitate.

“Please,” she breathed, her chocolate eyes searching his. “I’m not broken.”

His heart took flight and he pulled her in to capture her lips with his once more. Her fingers descended to his trousers, unbuttoning them and lowering the zip. She lifted herself off his lap to pull them off along with his pants. She pulled her own knickers off with some urgency before returning to straddle him.

Draco slowed her down with his hands, taking time to adorn her face, neck, and breasts with feather light touches and kisses. As he enclosed his lips around her nipple, his fingers found her slick folds. There was a sharp intake of breath, followed by a light moan. Her fingers delved into his hair as her head fell back. She circled her hips against his fingers, her need growing with each passing moment. He released his lips from her breast and kissed her once more, their movements becoming more urgent now.

At last he pulled her hips down over his aching cock and she released a soft sigh against his lips. He held her tight as they rocked together, slowly approaching that delicious precipice.

Hermione buried her face in the crook of his neck, her breath coming out in hot bursts as they built up speed. He thrust up to meet her as she rolled her hips back and forth. They kissed gently and slowly, their foreheads resting together. His eyes searched her rapturous face as she rode him. Her
movements became erratic as she grew closer, but he kept a steady pace beneath her. Her fingers gripped desperately into his hair as she clenched around him like a vice. With a strangled gasp and a cry, she quivered around him.

Draco kissed her gently as she came down from her high. Soon she was kissing him back with fervor and in mere moments he was done, his eyes rolling back as he plunged over the edge.

Hermione held him; peppering light kisses over his face and lips for a moment. When he opened his eyes, he saw a tear had escaped her eye. It forged a path down her cheek before being intercepted by his thumb, gently wiping it away. He kissed her with as much strength as he could muster, hoping to pass some of his strength along to her.

She moved off of him and lay down under the covers. He joined her and pulled her close. He held her face in his hands and searched her eyes. His heart was pounding in a way that he suspected had little to do with their activities.

“I do love you,” he confessed quietly, because why should he hold it in? Why wait to say it when he was so sure? Why wait when they could both be dead tomorrow?

She smiled, her eyes fluttering closed. “I know you do. And I love you.”

He pulled her close, feeling freer than he had ever felt in his life. For what could be more freeing than loving a wonderful woman, and having her love in return?

Chapter End Notes

FINALLY right?! This confession of love scene is one of the favorite ones I've written. One day, I'll write one that is inspired by the first time I told my current boyfriend that I love him, because it was so adorably perfect. But it wasn't at all right for this fic.

Anyways, let me know what you think! Reviews give me so much life!

Follow me on Tumblr for sneak peeks and updates: HGinny25
Chamber of Secrets

Hermione awoke one morning in late April to hear Draco muttering angrily. She sat up, clutching the blankets against her chest.

Draco was sitting by the window, shaking his wand in frustration. He murmured a spell and producing a few feeble yellow sparks before cursing under his breath. After a few more pathetic attempts at spell work, he fell back in the chair with a huff.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, her voice hoarse with sleep.

His eyes sought her, as if surprised to see her there. He shook his head. “Something’s wrong with my wand. Ever since I got it back from Potter, it hasn’t worked right. It’s almost like...” he trailed off, looking at his wand as if it had betrayed him.

“Like what?” she asked.

His eyes met hers. “Like I’m trying to use someone else’s wand.”

Hermione stood up, pulling on a large sweater. “Mr. Ollivander is here. Maybe he could help,” she suggested gently. She donned the rest of her clothes.

“Yeah, maybe,” Draco mumbled, eyeing his wand miserably.

“Come on, let’s get some breakfast and then we can see about your wand, yeah?” Grabbed her own wand and headed for the door.

With a sigh, he stood and pocketed his wand, following her out the door and down the stairs.

“What have you done to my wand, Potter?” Draco accused as they settled at the table.

“What do you mean?” Harry asked defensively.

“It isn’t working for me ever since you had it.”
“Well I didn’t do anything,” argued Harry, pushing his eggs around on his plate. “It worked just fine for me.”

“You were using it?” Draco seethed.

“I didn’t know it was yours,” insisted Harry. “I had a whole pocket full of wands. I tried the lot and just started using the one that worked best for me.”

“Well, you broke it.” Draco snapped.

“You’re being dramatic,” Hermione rolled her eyes. “I told you, we’ll go talk to Ollivander about it after breakfast. I’m sure it’s just psychological.”

“Oh, so there’s something wrong with my brain now?” Hermione glared. “I never said that. Don’t take your frustrations out on me.” He was surly and childish when things didn’t work out for him. She didn’t blame him for his sour mood. She was sure she would be moody as well if her wand weren’t working for her.

Draco just sneered and tucked into his meal.

Mr. Ollivander, while still choosing to stay secluded in his bedroom, had regained much of his strength. His imprisonment at Malfoy Manor had taken a severe toll on his health, but he was doing much better than he had been a month ago, and Bill had mentioned that they would soon move him to Aunt Muriel’s house until the end of the war. When Hermione, with both Draco and Harry in tow, knocked hesitantly on his bedroom door after breakfast, the aged wizard opened the door with a smile.

“Please, come in,” he offered, standing back so that the three could enter the room.

Hermione sat quietly while Draco explained his troubles with his wand. He told Ollivander how Harry had disarmed him and had worked for Harry, but wouldn’t work properly for Draco now that Harry had given it back.

When Draco had finished speaking, Ollivander asked to see the wand. Draco handed it over and Ollivander examined it carefully, even holding it up to his ear as if he were listening to its whispers.

After a moment, Ollivander eyed Draco apprehensively. “Well, Mr. Malfoy, it seems that your wand has changed allegiances.”

Draco stared at the wizard for several seconds. “What do you mean?”

“Wands can be fickle. When Mr. Potter disarmed you that night, it seems that your wand chose a new master.”

Draco’s jaw clenched, his face turned red. “What?” he seethed through his teeth.

Ollivander held up the wand. “This wand has decided that it is now Mr. Potter’s.”

“Decided?” echoed Draco incredulously.

“The wand chooses the wizard, Mr. Malfoy. You can keep this wand and try to make it yield to you once more, but I would suggest trying your hand with a different wand. You may find a new one much more responsive.”

“Wait,” said Harry. “I thought you had to kill a wizard in order to become their master’s wand.”
Ollivander’s voice shook a bit as he answered. “No…that is not necessary. It need only be won.”

“This is ridiculous!” declared Draco. “Witches and wizards are disarmed all the time! Their wands don’t change allegiances every time it happens.”

“No,” agreed Ollivander. “But it does happen occasionally. Especially in cases where the claimed wand is used by the disarmer after being won. It doesn’t always happen, but it’s possible.”

Draco ran his hands through his hair in frustration.

Hermione tried to intervene to help. “Perhaps, after the war, you could get a new wand from Mr. Ollivander. I’m sure it will work just as well as your old one.”

Draco took his wand back from Ollivander and paced around the room for a moment, holding his useless wand in his hand. Finally, he tossed his wand in Harry’s direction with a sneer.

“Take it then. Harry Potter always gets everything. Why should my wand be any different?” Then, like a wounded animal, he slinked away. After a moment Hermione heard their bedroom door close with a snap.

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Hermione gave Draco an hour to cool down before tentatively entering the room. She reached into her bag and pulled out all of the extra wands they had gotten when they escaped from Malfoy Manor.

She approached him tentatively and laid the wands out on the bed before him.

“I’m really sorry about your wand,” she offered timidly. “I thought you could try these and see if any of them work for you. I’m sure it won’t be the same as your old one, but…”

Draco frowned, but he sat up straighter to examine the wands. He reached for one of them and picked it up.

“This is my mother’s wand,” he said quietly.

There was something in his eyes, a pain that he hadn’t had the chance to process until this moment. Hermione recalled Narcissa at the Manor. She’d been thin and frail with dark circles under her tired eyes. She had clearly spent many of her days under the influence of the Imperious curse. Hermione couldn’t imagine the horrors Narcissa had endured since Draco ran away; and she couldn’t imagine the horror of watching your only child tortured in your home.

She thought of her own parents and how heartbreaking it had been for her to erase their memories and send them away. It was the hardest thing she had ever had to do, but at least they wouldn’t have to be a part of this war. In many ways Draco had it worse. Having to watch what his parents had been reduced to…she couldn’t imagine how difficult it must be for him.

His eyes were glassy as he looked at the wand. He closed them tightly for a few seconds, and when he opened them, his jaw was set and his eyes were cold again. He waved the wand, producing a healthy amount of blue sparks. He tilted his head briefly and nodded. “It’ll be fine for now,” he said.

“Okay,” Hermione breathed, wanting to talk to him about his parents but not having the slightest idea what to say.

Draco never talked about his parents. She couldn’t even begin to guess what kind of relationship he
had with them. Perhaps their relationship was complicated, or perhaps it was simply too painful to speak of them after he had abandoned them. She didn’t know, and right now she was too cowardly to ask.

“Harry wants to have a meeting later today with Griphook about the plan. You’ll join us, right?” she asked.

Draco nodded absently before trying a couple more spells with the new wand.

Hermione stood and shuffled her feet awkwardly for a moment. “I’m going downstairs. See you later?”

He nodded and she turned to leave.

“Wait,” he called, reaching out to catch her wrist.

She turned back and he pulled her over. He sat up to catch her lips with his, his hand drawing her in by the nape of her neck. He kissed her for a moment before pulling away, his thumb rubbing over her cheek affectionately. “Thank you,” he breathed before kissing her again.

She smiled before turning and making her way downstairs.

She approached Harry in the kitchen. “He’ll be alright; he just needs to cool down,” she told him.

He nodded absently at her, craning his neck to peer into the living room.

“What?” she asked, following his gaze.

“Shush,” he urged pulling her back out of sight.

“What?” she whispered.

Harry put his hand over her mouth and leaned over to look into the living room. After a second he turned back to her with a grin. “Ron’s in there with Luna,” he breathed.

“And?”

Harry just raised his eyebrows at her.

Her mouth dropped open. “Ron and Luna? Are you serious?” she asked craning her neck to look into the living room. Ron and Luna were sitting on the couch facing each other in conversation. It seemed innocent enough, but there was something about Ron’s eyes, some kind of starry glossiness that she recognized.

She turned back to Harry. “How long has this been going on?” she whispered.

He held his finger to his lips and beckoned her to the porch. She followed him and they settled on the porch swing.

“Umm…like a week or two?” Harry responded thoughtfully.

“He likes her? She’s so…eccentric.” She tilted her head slightly with the word.

Harry just shrugged. “She’s kind of brilliant though—in her own way.”

“How did this happen?” Hermione asked.
“I don’t know. How do any of these things happen? They talked a few times and then…I mean who knows?”

Hermione thought for a few moments. She didn’t understand it. Not one bit. She realized that she might never fully understand what had transpired between Ron and Luna, just like he would never understand what happened between her and Draco. Just because she hadn’t witnessed the beginning of their story didn’t mean it was any less lovely.

She realized that no one would ever understand what had happened between her and Draco. That didn’t make it any less real or any less beautiful. She vowed to give Ron and Luna a chance.

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The last evening of April was one of their worst in weeks. It was their last night of safety for the foreseeable future. Tomorrow morning they would be leaving for Gringotts before sunrise. The plan was set, Bill and Fleur were alerted that they were leaving, and there was a cauldron of Polyjuice Potion bubbling in the corner, ready for use. Next to their bed were two vials, each containing one long hair. Draco stared at the vial containing one curly black hair.

Tomorrow morning Hermione would add that hair to a glass of the rancid potion and turn into her. Draco’s stomach rolled at the thought. He wondered if she was worrying about it too. As if reading his thoughts, she rolled over in bed to stare at the ceiling, her eyes teary and fearful. “I don’t want to do it,” she breathed.

“You don’t have to,” Draco assured her quietly. “We can think of another plan.”

She shook her head. “No we can’t. This is the only way. I have to do it. I just…I can’t stand the thought of being her…even for a moment.” Tears were rolling down her face now. She brought the heels of her hands to her brows and pressed hard as her face screwed up. She took a deep, shuddering breath and then she was sobbing.

She curled onto her side, her fingers clutching desperately into her hair. Her sobs ripped from her throat with a force that surprised him. He tried to pull her into his chest to soothe her, but suddenly she was throwing her head back, gasping for breath, clutching at her neck as if trying to remove an invisible noose. Her breaths were fast and shallow, her sobs growing stronger.

Draco’s heart was pounding. There had been bad nights in the past month, yes, but this was something else. This was panic. Every fiber of her was raging against the mission ahead. He wished he could tell her that she needn’t do it. That they could get into Bellatrix’s vault another way. But there was no other way. She had told them all that she would rather be the one to take Bellatrix’s form, rather than have to look at her if someone else had taken her form. And they needed Bellatrix in order to obtain access to the Lestrange vault.

Still, she was sobbing and wheezing uncontrollably, and he had no idea how to help her.

He wanted to pull her in, but she was clearly having trouble breathing, so he just pulled her arms away from her head and placed his hands on her cheeks gently. “Look at me,” he said gently.

Her eyes squeezed tighter shut for a second. She was trembling violently, her shallow breaths terrifyingly quick. She shook her head against his hands, as if the idea of even opening her eyes would take all of her strength.

“It’s okay,” he promised. “Look at me.”

Her eyes fluttered open and met his.
“I need you to breathe with me,” he told her. “Okay?”

She nodded, her breaths still shuddering. He took a few deep, slow breaths in through his nose and out through his mouth.

Her eyes were still filled with fear, but slowly, over several minutes her breaths eased to match his.

After a few moments she inched closer and buried her face in his chest. He held her close, his hands smoothing over her hair gently.

It took several more minutes before the tears stopped and her breaths were smooth and even.

“You don’t have to do this. Say the word and I’ll go tell Potter to think of a new plan. But if you do this,” he began gently. “Her life gets a little worse. If you do this, she suffers.”

She didn’t speak again that night, but the following morning, just before she downed the potion, he watched her eyes close briefly. When they opened again, they were cold, determined, hard.

The warrior lived.
Diagon Alley was mostly deserted when Draco felt his feet touch down. The horrible likeness of Bellatrix Lestrange stood next to him. His heart was pounding despite knowing that his Hermione was underneath the eyes that haunted him. She looked back at him with some trepidation as well.

He nearly jumped when they passed a window and he caught sight of his reflection. Despite his physical similarities to his father, it was still jarring to see himself in his father's form. Weasley was trailing behind them, glancing at the reflection of his heavily transfigured face in the window. Hermione stared resolutely ahead, refusing to look at herself as they walked towards the gleaming marble bank.

Somewhere behind them, Potter and Griphook were under the invisibility cloak. Draco was grateful for the lack of crowd, hoping that they could get in and out of the bank without running into anyone who knew Lucius or Bellatrix.

"Mr. Malfoy! Madame Lestrange!"

Draco wheeled around to see Travers approaching them. His heart pounded. "Travers," he greeted coolly.

"I'm surprised to see you out and about," Travers said to them.

"Why?" Hermione demanded, arching one of Bellatrix's eyebrows haughtily.

Travers coughed. "Well, I heard that all of the inhabitants of the Manor were confined to the house after the…escape."

Draco opened his mouth to respond, but Hermione beat him to it.

"The Dark Lord is forgiving to his most faithful servants. Perhaps your credit is not as good with him as is ours, Travers."

Draco glanced at the woman beside him. If he didn't know better, he would be fooled by Hermione's impeccable impression of Bellatrix. She was magnificent. Even Travers seemed convinced.
"But whose wands are you using? Lucius, I heard yours broke months ago."

Draco tugged casually on the cuff of his sleeve in a way that he'd seen his father do thousands of times. "My wife has no use of hers at the Manor."

Travers eyed the wand, but seemed satisfied. "And you?" he asked, turning to Hermione. "I heard yours was—"

Hermione held up Bellatrix's wand. "I have my wand here. I don't know what rumors you have heard, but you have been woefully misinformed."

Travers looked at her skeptically, but turned to Ron. "And you?"

"This is Dragomir Despard. He speaks very little English, but he is sympathetic to the Dark Lord's aims. He is here from Transylvania to see our new regime," said Hermione.

"Indeed? How do you do?"

"'Ow you?" drawled Ron.

"So what brings you both and your friend to Diagon Alley this morning?"

"Bellatrix needs to visit Gringotts," Draco said.

"Ah, allow me to accompany you. I too need to access my vault."

"I have enough accompaniment, thank you." Hermione said coldly, brushing past the tall man and heading towards Gringotts.

Draco followed her, trying to adopt his father's proud gait with the walking stick they had transfigured to look like Lucius'.

Travers trailed after them. "Forgive me, Madame Lestrange, have I offended you in some way?"

Hermione stiffened. She opened her mouth to say something nice and reassuring before she caught herself, her lips snapping shut and casting a haughty look at Travers. "We are here under the request of the Dark Lord. I do not need to explain myself to you. Good day."

Still Travers was just steps behind them, trying to figure out why he was being treated thusly. Draco rolled his eyes and raised his mother's wand. The quicker they neutralized the Travers issue, the quicker they could get inside Gringotts.

"Imperio," he whispered, and he felt a tingling in his arm as Travers bent to his will.

The Death Eater's eyes went a little glassy and he silently fell into step beside Weasley, who looked a bit bewildered, but maintained his scowl.

They approached the bank, and Draco made Travers speak to the guards first. They passed over his body with golden rods, which Griphook had told them were Probity Probes, used to detect concealment charms and hidden magical objects.

From his left, Draco heard Potter whisper "Confundo," twice, flicking his wand at each of the guards from underneath the Invisibility Cloak.

Hermione finally approached them and held up her hand when they tried to pass the probe over her. "You've just done that," she insisted. The first guard looked confused and glanced at his partner.
The second guard nodded. "Yeah, we checked this lot already." He waved them through the front doors and they all swept forward, making an effort not to look too relieved or eager.

Miraculously, they were inside. Draco tried not to feel too optimistic. Cursing Travers and confounding two guards was easy compared to what he knew stood between them and achieving their goal.

The group walked across the marble floor, their fine leather shoes echoing throughout the quiet chamber. They approached the far counter and Hermione cleared her throat pointedly.

"Madame Lestrange," greeted the goblin. His name plate identified him as 'Bogrod.' "How—how may I help you today?"

"I wish to enter my vault," said Hermione.

The goblin eyed her skeptically. "Do you have any identification?"

Hermione's mouth fell open briefly. "Identification? I have never before been asked for identification!" she protested.

"Your wand will do," said Bogrod, holding out his hand.

Terror gripped Draco. They must have been tipped off to expect an imposter. The goblins knew that Bellatrix had had her wand stolen. Just when he was about to intervene, Bogrod announced, "Ah, you've had a new wand made!"

Hermione blinked. But, other than that small tic, she didn't show her confusion. The goblin had the same glassy-eyed look that Travers had. Potter must have Imperioused the goblin as well. Draco wouldn't admit it, but he was impressed.

"Very well, Madame Lestrange. We can accommodate you today. Mr. Malfoy, do you need access to your vault as well?"

Draco cleared his throat. "Not today. I am merely accompanying Madame Lestrange."

"Yes, alright. Please follow me. I shall take you to the Lestrange vault. I'll need the Clankers." The goblin hopped off his stool and began to walk toward the entrance to the cavernous vaults, grabbing a leather bag on the way. Draco glanced back at Travers, who was just standing vacantly in the middle of the bank. He couldn't very well lift the curse now. Travers would report them immediately. He flicked his wand and the tall man shuffled after them through the doorway.

The great iron door slammed shut, the bang echoing through the caverns.

"We're in trouble; they suspect," said Potter, pulling off the Invisibility Cloak as Griphook jumped from his shoulders. Potter looked over at their unexpected Death Eater companion. "Imperius curse?"

Draco nodded, jerking his head to the goblin. "Same?"

Harry grunted in agreement. "I don't know how well I did though. It might not be strong enough."

"Well, we've gotten this far," said Weasley. "Let's just go on."

"We won't have room for him," said Griphook gruffly, pointing a bony finger at Travers.

Draco surveyed the Death Eater for a moment. "What should we do with him?"
'Well we can't send him back out there, nor can we lift the curse. And if they find him back here alone they'll know something is wrong," Hermione reasoned, shifting her weight from foot to foot nervously.

"Make him hide," suggested Harry as he clambered into the cart after Bogrod.

Draco flicked his wand at Travers and the wizard set off down the path. He got a couple hundred meters away before he wiggled into a crack in the wall and disappeared from sight.

Once they were all in the cart, squeezed together quite uncomfortably, it set off down the tracks. They wound through the vast underground chambers, flying deeper into the earth. They made a sharp turn and Draco saw a powerful waterfall pouring over the track just ahead of them. Griphook shouted, lunging for the brakes, but they barreled through it, water pounding down on top of them with alarming force.

Then, suddenly they were capsized, falling from the cart and plummeting down, down into the depths of the vaults.

He heard Hermione screech something, and they slowed, landing painlessly on the unyielding floor.

"C-cushioning charm," spluttered Hermione, as she stood up.

Draco's stomach twisted with dread. She no longer looked like Bellatrix. He wheeled around to look at everyone. Weasley's transfigured face was back to normal as well. He looked down at his own hands, younger than they had looked a moment ago, and felt his face and hair checking to see if they had reverted as well.

Their disguises were gone.

"The Thief's Downfall," said Griphook. "Washes away all enchantment and magical concealment. They know there are imposters in Gringotts."

Somewhere, miles above them, the guards were likely springing into action. How long before they were all caught and taken back to the Manor?

Bogrod was looking around, blinking in confusion. The Imperius curse had lifted. Potter quickly waved his wand at the goblin and said "Imperio."

"How will we get out again?" Weasley asked, looking at the shattered remains of their cart.

Potter looked around for a moment before saying, "Let's worry about that when we have to."

If that wasn't code for 'Fuck if I know,' Draco didn't know what was. All the same, he set off into the darkness after Griphook and the others.

They rounded a corner, and though Draco had seen it before and was prepared for it, his heart still paused at the sight of the great, pale dragon before them. Its eyes were pink and its scales flaky. It was tethered by its neck and back legs to large chains connected to enormous spikes. As the group approached, it turned to them and roared. Hermione clapped her hands over her ears and Draco barely had time to grab her arm and pull her back as the dragon spat a stream of fire at them.

"It's learned to expect pain when it hears the Clankers," said Griphook. Weasley reached into Bogrod's leather bag and pulled out the metal instruments, distributing them to the group. "The dragon will retreat. Then we'll need Bogrod to place his palm on the vault door."
They all advanced, shaking their Clankers as they went. The horrible ringing echoed through the vaults. The dragon roared again, but retreated as Griphook had predicted.

Hermione was no longer shaking her Clankers, but was staring at the beast with pity.

"Come on, Granger," Draco said gently, grabbing hold of her hand. "You can't help. This isn't why we're here."

Regretfully, she followed him to the vault door, where Potter was placing Bogrod's hand against the intricate door. It melted away to reveal the Lestrange vault. It reminded Draco of his own family's vault. It contained less gold, perhaps—no wizarding families were richer than the Malfoys—but it was no less impressive. It was packed to the brim with gold coins and goblets, the skins of creatures he had only read about in books, and jewelry worth more money than Weasley had ever seen in his lifetime.

"Search fast!" said Harry as they all entered.

The door closed behind them, submerging them in total darkness.

"Lumos," whispered Hermione.

The other three wizards all followed suit.

"It could be the cup," said Harry. "Look for that first."

Draco cast his wand high and looked around at the riches in the vault. There were dozens of goblets and cups. How was he supposed to know which one was a horcrux?

Hermione reached for a jeweled goblet. "Harry, perhaps…? Ahh!" she yelled out, dropping the goblet. It clattered to the ground and immediately split into many goblets. "It burned me!" she cried, clutching her hand.

"The Gemino and Flagrante Curses," said Draco. He recalled hearing his father speak of the security in their own vault.

"Yes," said Griphook. "Everything you touch will burn and multiply. The copies are worthless, but they'll eventually crush you under a mountain of burning gold."

"Do you know how to stop it?" Weasley asked, his eyes fixing on the blond wizard.

"I'm not a bloody curse breaker, Weasley," Draco countered.

"We can't counter the curses," said Griphook.

"Don't touch anything!" Potter urged. Before they could all step a safe distance away from the riches, Weasley brushed up against one of the goblet copies, and it split into at least a dozen more.

"You idiot!" Draco snarled.

"I didn't do it on purpose!" Weasley retorted, hissing in pain as one of the copies burned through his shoe.

"Just quit moving!" Potter snapped. "Look around. Remember, it will have Hufflepuff's crest on it. It might be something of Ravenclaw's too. So look for an eagle as well."

They all looked around for a moment. It was impossible not to touch anything. The vault was too
crowded and the paths were too narrow. The floor was soon littered with hot glowing galleons, heating the room like a sauna.

"There!" Potter shouted, pointing to the highest shelf. A small cup bearing Hufflepuff’s crest sat on a shelf with a dozen or so other treasures. It was an unremarkable cup, all things considered. Draco shivered at the thought that something so unassuming could contain a piece of the Dark Lord’s soul.

"How the hell do we get to it?" asked Weasley.

Hermione tried to summon it, forgetting that Griphook had already warned them that those actions wouldn’t work.

"Give me the sword!" Potter said.

Hermione rummaged through her beaded bag and withdrew the sword. Harry took it and tested it against a silver plate. Nothing happened. "I need to get up there. If I can poke the sword through the handle…"

The shelf was too high for any of them to reach. The sound of Clankers and the dragon’s roar rose on the other side of the door. The guards were coming. They were out of time.

"Levicorpus," Hermione said, sending Harry into the air by his ankle. He slammed against a suit of armor, which multiplied, sending burning copies raining down on the rest of them. Potter hovered upside down, trying to loop the cup around the gleaming sword.

Hermione cried out as the multiplying gold grew around them, searing their skin. "Impervius!" she tried on herself, Draco, and Weasley, as well as the two goblins. The spell did nothing to protect them from the metals now burning through their clothes and skin.

Draco’s eyes found Hermione, now up to her waist in scalding gold. Her panicked eyes were darting around the vault, following the chaos of Potter grappling for the cup. This was it. This was the end of them. Buried alive under a sea of flesh-melting gold. He supposed it was better than being taken back to the Manor. At least it would be over quicker. They wouldn’t be kept for weeks in a dungeon, tortured repeatedly, and then killed off one by one.

Just as the gold reached his chest, he was carried through the vault door in an avalanche of fiery metals.

Griphook was running away, brandishing the Sword of Gryffindor screaming, "Thieves! Help!"

Draco slipped as he stood up, eventually finding his footing and pulling Hermione up by her arm. She winced and tugged her wand from her pocket. Potter and Weasley were firing stunning spells into a crowd of goblins who were fast approaching. Several guards were approaching as well. "Stupefy!" Draco shouted, watching a goblin fall.

Hermione was firing into the crowd, but her eyes kept darting to the dragon. He saw the idea spark within her.

She turned to him quickly, her eyes wide with inspiration and terror. He recognized that look. It was the same look she had had all those months ago in the forest, just before she had grabbed his hand and bolted with him through the trees. He had never understood why she’d run off with him, but it was now abundantly clear. Perhaps Hermione Granger couldn’t look at a chained, tortured beast without needing to save it. His own chains hadn’t been so physical, but she had seen them all the same.
Draco nearly smiled. "You're mental. I love it."

"This way!" Hermione yelled, releasing the thick chains from the dragon's legs and neck with a flourish of her wand. Draco, Potter, and Weasley still fired spell after spell at the goblins and guards as they all sprinted toward the nearly blind dragon.

"Climb up," Draco urged, bracing his hand on Hermione's back as she hauled herself up. She scrambled up onto the beast's back before turning back. Her fearful eyes found his and she reached for him. He climbed up as quickly as he could, grabbing hold of her hand. Potter and Weasley were right behind him.

The Ukrainian Ironbelly reared back and Draco clutched tightly to it, wrapping an arm protectively around Hermione as they took flight. The dragon clawed its way higher and higher through the caverns toward the tiny promise of daylight above.

Hermione was blasting away at the rocks to help the dragon's escape. The boys followed her lead until they were bursting into the fine, marble lobby of the bank. Goblins and wizards scattered, shrieking in horror as the dragon broke through the door and took flight into the air.

They soared higher into the air leaving the bank and Draco's fears of capture and death behind. Weasley was swearing loudly behind him, and Hermione was trembling quietly. Draco recalled a late night conversation, during one of the weeks before they met up with Potter and Weasley, when, entangled in each other's arms, she had confessed her deep fear of flying. He held her a bit tighter. Potter was quiet, so quiet that Draco turned around to make sure he hadn't fallen off. He was there, his eyes closed in apparent relief.

They flew high over London until the city was left behind. After several minutes the countryside was stretched out below them. Draco wondered how far they would go before the dragon landed. And, more importantly, once it landed, how would they all get away without being charred to a crisp and eaten?

They flew for hours, until the sun was low in the sky. Draco's muscles were aching from clutching the dragon's scales, but he didn't dare loosen his grip for even a second, keeping his arm still firmly around Hermione.

"We're getting lower!" Weasley shouted.

Draco peered over the side of the dragon. They were much lower now, and over a large lake.

"I say we jump to the water!" Potter called to them.

Hermione nodded, her eyes squeezed shut. Her knuckles were white from clutching the dragon's scales so tightly.

"NOW!" shouted Potter, releasing the scales and sliding off the back of the dragon.

Draco grabbed Hermione's hand and pushed them away from the beast's back, plummeting through the air for several seconds before hitting the water hard.

He held fast to Hermione's hand as they kicked for the surface. They emerged, spluttering for air. Potter and Weasley were nearby, but the dragon had swooped on, landing on the far bank of the lake.

Draco released Hermione's hand as they all paddled toward the nearest shore. As soon as they crawled onto the slippery grass, Hermione collapsed, gasping and trembling. Draco let himself flop
next to her. His muscles were aching from clinging to the dragon for so many hours. He looked up at the darkening sky, feeling the cool air fill his lungs. Breathing had never felt so good. Every time they escaped death it felt a little sweeter to just breathe.

He turned his head to the side to see Potter and Weasley putting up protective enchantments. Hermione’s eyes were closed and there were angry red burns covering her face, neck, and arms. He was sure there were many more that he couldn’t see. He sat up with a groan and looked at his own arms, also covered in burns.

After a moment, Hermione sat up and dug through her beaded bag. She removed a bottle of dittany, four bottles of pumpkin juice, and a change of clothes for each of them. She stripped down to her knickers and began to dab the dittany onto her wounds. Draco did the same, feeling a rush of warm gratitude as she helped him with the burns on his face.

"You were brilliant," he breathed as her fingers ghosted over his cheek.

She smiled meekly at him. "So were you."

He shook his head. "No. I didn’t do anything. It was all you, love." He leaned forward and kissed her gently.

She beamed at him as he pulled back. She passed the dittany to Weasley and turned to don her clean and dry clothes. "Do you think it’ll be alright?" she asked.

Draco followed her gaze to the dragon drinking water across the lake. He laughed. "It’s a dragon, Granger. I’m sure it will be fine."

"Yeah, thanks to you!" called Weasley with a grin.

"Please tell me we got the bloody Horcrux," Draco said to Potter.

Potter reached into his pocket and pulled out the small golden cup.

"Well that’s the good news. The bad news is…" Weasley began.

"No sword," concluded Potter.

"And You-Know-Who will definitely know that we’re hunting horcruxes now," Hermione pointed out as she pulled on her trainers.

"Yes, most likely," said Potter. "Maybe…" suddenly he went very quiet and fell back onto the grass. His eyes were open wide and unseeing.

"Harry? Harry!" Hermione cried. She fell to her knees next to him. She shook him, but he didn’t seem to notice.

"Do you think it’s his connection to You-Know-Who?" Weasley asked with worry.

"Block him out, Potter. We trained for this," Draco said loudly. But if Potter could hear him at all, he didn’t show it. He was beyond blocking the Dark Lord out.

After several moments, Potter blinked and slowly sat up. He looked around at the others with some confusion, as if he had forgotten where he was.

"He knows," he said hoarsely. "He’s going to check on the others. The last one is at Hogwarts."
"Hogwarts, really?" Weasley said.

"What did you see? How do you know?" Hermione asked.

"I saw him find out about the cup at the Manor. I was in his head. He's angry and scared. He killed so many of them," he choked out.

Terror gripped Draco. "My parents," he gulped. "Did you see my parents?"

Green eyes met grey for a moment. "They got out in time. They weren't hurt," Harry promised.

Draco sat back on the grass in relief. His heart was pounding at the thought of his parents running from a vengeful Voldemort. At least he would be leaving the Manor to check on the horcruxes now. They would be safe for a time.

"He's checking the one at Hogwarts last. He thinks it'll be safe with Snape there," Harry explained.

"Do you know where in Hogwarts it is?" Weasley asked.

Potter shook his head. "He was more focused on worrying about all the other horcruxes." He stood up, gathering their things and stuffing them into Hermione's bag.

"Wait, we need a plan!" cried Hermione. "How do you propose we get into the school? The place is swarming with Death Eaters."

Potter shrugged. "We'll apparate to Hogsmeade and take one of the secret passageways. We'll try Honeydukes first and work our way to the Shrieking Shack."

"Snape knows about the shack," Hermione reminded him.

"Well then we'll have to hope he forgot about it, or that the Honeydukes passage works," Harry reasoned.

"You do realize that Hogsmeade is probably full of Death Eaters, right?" Draco said.

"Well, we don't have time to think of a different plan. If he checks the other horcruxes and gets to Hogwarts before we do, he could move it somewhere else. We have to get to it before he can," Harry said frantically. "Listen, we'll go under the cloak, alright?"

"All four of us won't fit under it," Hermione fretted. "It would barely come to our knees."

"It'll be dark," said Harry.

Hermione looked around at Draco and Weasley, as if hoping one of them would come up with a better plan or talk Harry out of it.

"It's the only way, 'Mione," Weasley said.

She sighed, her brows knitted together. "I'm disillusioning our legs. It will take a few minutes, but it's the only way I'm going to Hogsmeade tonight."

Not being able to see one's feet was the strangest sensation, thought Draco as they prepared to apparate to Hogsmeade. But then again, there were much more pressing issues at work than not knowing where your feet were. He was wedged between Hermione and Potter, Weasley behind him. They were all back-to-back to form as tight of a cluster as they could to keep the cloak over them as much as possible.
Draco couldn't help but think that they would all be much better covered if he were not with them. He wondered how many times the three of them had been under this cloak on their little adventures.

"Ready?" Potter asked, glancing around at all of them. One hand was clutching Draco's old wand and the other grasping the cloak.

They all nodded and held tight to each other before Potter pulled them along, apparating to Hogsmeade.

No sooner had they landed in the street between Zonko's and Honeydukes, than the air was filled with a horrible screeching. They all ducked down a little, covering their ears and looking around for the source of the offending noise.

They had barely gotten their bearings when at least a dozen large Death Eaters came barreling out of the Three Broomsticks, wands drawn. "POTTER!" one of them shouted. "Accio, cloak!"

Hermione gasped and reached for the cloak, but it miraculously did not move. Draco's heart leapt at their luck.

"Not under your wrapper then, eh, Potter? Well, you can't hide from us. Spread out. He's here." Half of the Death Eaters hurried down the street in their direction. The young wizards under the cloak all pressed themselves against the wall and the Death Eaters missed them by inches.

"Get the Dementors!" One of them shouted. "The Dark Lord needs his life, not his soul."

Draco's stomach twisted painfully. No one in their group would be able to produce a Patronus without giving their position away. The air was getting colder already.

"We have to Disapparate," Hermione said. She grabbed hold of them and attempted to pull them along. Nothing happened. The Death Eaters must have warded the street against apparition.

Dementors were gliding down the street now; at least ten of them. The lights on the street and in the shops flickered out one by one. The four of them stumbled down the street, trying to stay as silent as possible, but tripping over each other's feet in an effort to stay under the cloak.

Draco grabbed his wand. Could he produce a Patronus? He had only succeeded a handful of times, and even those had only been feeble wisps. The Dementors were coming closer, as if sensing their fear. It seemed that they knew exactly where they were.

Draco raised his wand and whispered, "Expecto Patronum." A feeble mist erupted from his wand. The Dementor closest to them paused briefly, but the wisp flickered and disappeared. He tried again, but the wisp was even weaker.

He was beginning to panic now. Happy thoughts were harder to find, and they were nearly cornered in an alley now.

"Expecto Patronum," Potter said quietly, and a great silver stag erupted from his wand. It galloped down the street and sent the Dementors scattering.

"It is Potter! That's his Patronus! The stag!" One of the Death Eaters was shouting from just out of sight. They were coming, and Draco and the others would be killed.

"Potter, in here," came a gruff voice from their left. They all wheeled around and for a moment, Draco could have sworn it was Albus Dumbledore standing in the doorway before he recognized the man as the owner of the Hog's Head.
"It's him or the Death Eaters. I say we trust him," said Weasley, pulling them all through the narrow doorway.

"Down the stairs. Stay out of sight," said the elderly wizard.

They all hurried to obey, the cloak slipping off of their shoulders as they clamoured down the steps. As soon as they reached the bottom, Potter threw the cloak back over their heads and they all stood very still, listening to the raised voices above them.

After a moment, the barkeep seemed to convince the Death Eaters that he had set off the Caterwauling charm by putting the cat out, and that they had mistaken his goat Patronus for a stag.

A few moments later, the wizard stomped down the stairs and Potter pulled the cloak off of them all. Draco sank into an uncomfortable wooden chair. It suddenly occurred to him that they had not slept in at least twenty hours, and were unlikely to sleep any time soon.

"You're a damn fool, Harry Potter," the man grumbled.

"We can't thank you enough. You saved our lives," Potter said.

The barman just grunted.

"You're Aberforth, aren't you? I saw your eye in the mirror. You sent Dobby," Potter remarked.

"Where have you left him?"

"He's dead," said Harry.

"Shame. I liked him."

"Where did you get that mirror?"

"Bought it from Dung last year. Albus told me what it was. I've been looking out for you."

"Thank you," breathed Hermione.

"You must be hungry," said Aberforth. He shuffled into the next room.

Hermione turned to Draco. "Are you alright?" she asked, taking in his ashen face.

Draco grabbed hold of her hand and she kneeled in front of him. "I'm sorry…the Dementors…I couldn't…"

Hermione cupped his cheek gently. "It's okay. Don't worry about it."

"I wish I could…"

"You can do it," she interrupted. "I'm sure you can. Just focus on your happy thoughts. I believe in you." She leaned in and gave him a chaste kiss. "I love you," she murmured against his lips.

Aberforth returned with a tray of bread and cheese, as well as four goblets of pumpkin juice. "Well I'm afraid we can't get you out of here tonight. The Caterwauling Charm won't be lifted until sunrise."

"We aren't leaving," Potter said firmly. "We need to get into Hogwarts tonight."
"Don't be stupid," spat Aberforth. "You've got to get as far away from here as you can."

"I've got a job to do," insisted Potter.

They fought for several minutes. Aberforth Dumbledore said many things that Draco agreed with. He wanted to leave, get himself and Hermione as far away from Hogwarts and the war as possible and hide. But they'd come this far.

"I can't leave. I know how to finish him and I intend to do it—or die trying. I'm not stupid. I know how this might end. I've known for years." Potter said firmly.

What a bloody Gryffindor, thought Draco.

"We've got to get into Hogwarts. We could use your help, but if you won't, then we'll wait until daybreak and find a way in on our own. We'll leave you in peace and you can stay here and wait out the war in safety."

Aberforth looked at the young wizard for a moment as if he had never witnessed such daft, determined bravery. Finally he turned to the painting on the wall and gave the girl in it a little nod. The girl smiled and turned to walk out of the portrait. Not sideways, as was typical, but straight back into the painting behind her.

"Only one way in now," said Aberforth. "All the old passageways are covered at both ends by Death Eaters. Dementors patrol the border walls. Hogwarts has never been so heavily guarded."

The girl in the painting was returning, and she wasn't alone. A boy was limping along behind her. They got closer and closer until the painting swung open, revealing a long tunnel and Neville Longbottom.

"Harry! I knew you'd come!" he said with a lopsided grin. His face was cut, his robes ripped, and he sported a deep purple bruised eye. He wrapped his arms around Harry. "Ron, Hermione, great to see you too!" He hugged them each in turn before turning to Draco and pausing. He chuckled. "I have to say, you're a surprise, Malfoy."

"He's with us," Potter said at once.

"Oh, yeah?" Longbottom's eyebrows shot up. "Well that's good news. One more for us and one less for ol' snake face, right?"

Weasley grinned. "That's true." He peered past Longbottom down the long tunnel. "That leads to Hogwarts?"

"Yup," Neville grinned. "Aberforth, we might have a few more come through. Come on." He beckoned them to follow him.

Potter and Weasley disappeared into the tunnel behind Longbottom. Draco hesitated. It was foolish of him to have assumed that he would never set foot inside Hogwarts again. Or perhaps it had just been wishful thinking. After last year, and all the hell he went through, walking those halls was the last thing he wanted to do.

Hermione slipped her hand into his and gave him a reassuring smile.

Feeling braver now, he walked beside her down the tunnel toward the castle.
Chapter End Notes

Comment and let me know what you think! Follow me on Tumblr: HGinny25
Thank you so much for all of your comments! I appreciate each and every comment so much. Even if I get busy and can't respond to all of them, just know that I read them all and love each and every one of them. And also, thanks for patiently waiting for this chapter. I had another performance last week, so writing really went on the back burner. I made this chapter nice and long like the last one to make up for it. I hope you enjoy!

BIG thank you to disenchantedglow for being my wonderful alpha, and to inandoutlikethesea for being my beta. Y'all are great and you help me grow!

The Room of Requirement was hardly recognizable when Neville led their little quartet into it. There were dozens of hammocks strung up between tall pillars. The walls were lined with bookshelves, cozy fireplaces, and plush couches. Hermione barely had a moment to take it all in before she was engulfed in hugs from her former schoolmates. Her hand was pulled from Draco’s as she was jostled into the crowd. She turned back to him. He looked somewhat lost. No one seemed to have processed his presence yet. Everyone’s attentions were fixed on Harry, Ron, and Hermione.

Hermione looked around. Everyone’s eyes were on Harry. They looked as if their messiah had returned, and in a way, she supposed, he had. They were shouting his name, cheering, and clapping. Ron was beaming as Seamus clapped him on the shoulder.

Gradually, the excitement of seeing their Golden Trio began to fade, and Draco’s presence was noticed.

“What’s he doing here?” Seamus spat.

Hermione tried to push her way through the crowd to get to him, but there were too many people. “He’s on our side!” she cried over the din of angry Gryffindors. The students closing in on Draco stepped back and turned to gawk at her. She squeezed through to stand by him, protecting him from the students closing in around him. “He’s been with us for months.”

“How long?” Michael Corner asked.

“Since about November,” Harry answered.

“He’s been with me since last June,” Hermione declared.

Her classmates stared at her in disbelief.

“Listen, you can all stand here and demand explanations if you want, but You-Know-Who is on his way, and we’ve got a job to do. The way I see it, the only thing you all need to know is that I trust him. I most likely wouldn’t be alive without him,” said Harry. His eyes were dark on the crowd, daring someone to challenge him. No one did.

“What’s the job?” asked Neville. Everyone’s eyes turned away from Draco and back to Harry.
Harry looked around apprehensively. “Alright. We’re looking for something. I think it might have been something of Ravenclaw’s. It’s hidden somewhere in the castle. Anyone got any ideas of what it might be?”

“Well, there’s Rowena Ravenclaw’s lost diadem,” said Michael Corner after a tense moment. “But I doubt that’s what you’re looking for. Legend says that no one has seen it in centuries.”

There was some renewed commotion as several people exited the tunnel. Hermione grinned at the sight of Dean and Luna. Everyone rushed to greet them, but Luna made a beeline straight for Draco. She wrapped her arms around his neck.

Draco stiffened, unsure of how to react to such an innocent display of acceptance.

Just before the blonde girl pulled away, Hermione heard her whisper something to Draco. He blinked and forced a tight smile.

The students seemed as stunned at Luna’s actions as Draco had been, but Luna just smiled and continued to greet everyone.

There were more people coming down the tunnel now. Hermione could just make out Ginny’s long, shiny ginger hair before she was engulfed in hugs. With Ginny were Fred and George, Cho Chang, and Lee Jordan. They were all smiles; the prospect of battle was seemingly exciting for them, though Hermione couldn’t understand why.

“What are you all doing here?” Ron asked as Luna placed a chaste kiss on his freckled cheek.

She reached into her pocket and produced her golden D.A. galleon. “Neville promised he’d let us know when you arrived.”

Ginny approached Harry and wrapped her arms around his neck.

“Where have you been?” Harry asked.

“The Burrow,” she answered with a grin, her blue eyes shining. “After you lot got captured, I couldn’t come back to school. They knew Ron was with you then. Luckily I was already home for Easter.”

“We’re fighting, right?” Fred asked.

Harry hesitated. “That’s not why we’re here. We just need to find something.”

“But You-Know-Who is coming, right?” Neville said.

“I never said that,” Harry said firmly. There was a quick exchange of glances between himself and Hermione before he continued, “but yes, he’ll be here. I’d guess before the night is out, he’ll be here.”

There was an uproar of gasps and chattering. “Then it’s war!” proclaimed Seamus.

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves,” said Harry. “We still have a job to do first. It’s important, and it will help us defeat him. Someone tell me more about this diadem.”

“The lost diadem?” Luna asked dreamily. “Oh, it’s lovely.”

“You’ve seen it?” Hermione questioned skeptically.
“Only a picture,” replied Luna. “There’s a portrait of Rowena Ravenclaw in the common room.”

“Well, that’s a start. Luna, can you take me there?” Harry asked.

Luna nodded. Neville showed them to the exit.

Ron leaned close to Hermione’s ear to whisper to her. “Even if he finds it, how will we destroy it? We don’t have the sword.”

Hermione chewed the inside of the cheek. “I don’t know,” she murmured.

“I actually have an idea,” said Ron. “I have no idea if it will work, but it’s worth a shot. We’ll just need a broom and we’ll need to go to the ladies’ room.”

Hermione’s eyes lit up. “Brilliant, Ron!” she grinned. “Do you think you could get in?”

Ron shrugged. “No idea. But I heard Harry open the locket. I bet I could replicate what he did.”

“Let’s go!” she began to pull Draco toward the exit with Ron.

“Wait, I…” Draco began. “I think I should go to the Slytherin common room.”

“What?” Hermione balked.

“You want to go into the snake pit when You-Know-Who is knocking on the gates?” Ron spat.

“Watch it, Weasley. I’m one of those snakes. And I’m willing to bet that a few of them would fight with us.”

“What makes you think that?” Ron asked.

Draco turned his cold eyes to the ginger boy. “Because no one was more brainwashed by You-Know-Who’s ideas than I was last year. If I can change sides, then I bet some of them can be swayed too.”

Hermione beamed at him. “Okay. Meet us back here, yeah?”

Draco nodded. His eyes danced between her and Ron for a second. “Be careful, will you?”

“You too.”

Draco turned to head for the exit.

“Draco!” Hermione called. He stopped and turned back. “Just make sure they’re telling the truth.”

He thought for a moment before snapping his fingers and giving her a stiff nod. He hurried through the tiny false cupboard exit and disappeared.

“I doubt he’ll get any snakes to join us. They’d be fighting against their families most likely,” Ron scoffed.

Hermione just smiled. “I wouldn’t underestimate him if I were you. After all, his parents will be on the other side once the battle begins.”

Ron tilted his head slightly, as if he hadn’t considered this before now, and Hermione thought about how easy it must be for Ron to have his entire family on one side of this war. He wouldn’t have to
watch a Death Eater fall and wonder if it was his own father behind the mask. He would not have to watch people on his own side celebrate his parents’ deaths.

“Let’s get to the Chamber and back as quick as we can,” suggested Hermione. She didn’t want Draco to return from the dungeons before she and Ron got back.

Ron nodded and walked with her out into the dark castle.

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Draco’s heart was pounding as he quickly made his way toward the dungeons. He was about to willingly announce to his Slytherin classmates that he had sided with Potter. What would they do? Did they already know of his betrayal? Perhaps they would stun him on sight. Perhaps even kill him. What if they asked about Hermione? Should he lie to keep her safe? Or tell the truth to demonstrate his own personal transformation?

He skidded to a halt outside of Slughorn’s office. Hermione had been right. He would need to make sure that any Slytherins who offered to help him were being truthful. The last thing they needed was someone to turn their wand on Harry before they’d destroyed all the horcruxes.

It was late, and the professor was most likely asleep in his private quarters. Still, Draco entered the room cautiously. It was dark and quiet inside. He lit his wand and walked toward the storage closet. It was locked, but a quick Alohamora opened the door with a soft click.

Draco examined the multitude of potions upon the shelves. They were alphabetized, and though he had intended to go straight for the Vs, he couldn’t help but pause at F. It would be all too easy to nick some Felix Felicis. How much liquid luck would it take to keep himself and Hermione safe throughout the night? He’d have to get some for Potter and Weasley too, he knew, otherwise Hermione would just split her share with them.

His fingers ghosted over the phials in the F section. He checked, and checked again. There was no Felix Felicis. He checked under L for Liquid Luck. There was none to be found. His heart sank, but he didn’t have time to dwell on it. He turned around, bending at the waist to examine the Vs. There were two small phials of Veritaserum. He grabbed them both and put them in his pocket.

He turned to leave, but paused. There was most likely going to be a gruesome battle before morning; surely there were other potions here that might be useful. He grabbed a phial of dittany and a flask of pain-relieving potion before leaving, locking the closet door behind him.

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The entrance to the Chamber of Secrets gave Hermione chills. The large snake door symbolized everything that was standing against her in this war. Slytherin had built this place to keep her out of this school, out of this world. Yet here she stood, about to step into the chamber where surely no muggleborn had been before.

Ron was hissing next to her, just as he’d been doing for five minutes now. He sounded fairly ridiculous. Why had Ron thought he could speak Parseltongue? Just when she was about to tell him that they should give up and try something else, there was a loud thud. She jumped at the sudden noise and watched as the stone snake made its way around the circular door, unlocking the many snake-shaped latches.

Her heart was pounding as the door swung open to reveal the dark chamber.

“Well done, Ron,” she breathed as they entered.
“I’m not a fucking moron,” he grumbled.

Hermione stared at him in confusion. “I never said you were.”

“No, but that’s why you gave up on me isn’t it? As if Draco is so perfect.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “I never said he’s perfect. He’s not. I’m not under any delusions about who he is.”

“And you still like him?” he said incredulously.

“Ron,” she chided. “Is now the time?”

“I’m not trying to start a fight with you. I just want to know why.”

“I’ve told you why!” Hermione yelled, continuing into the cavernous chamber, her anger at Ron making her forget her previous unease at entering the room.

“You’ve told me that you started to trust him while you two were on your own. That doesn’t have anything to do with me,” Ron argued.

“Exactly!” Hermione threw her arms into the air in frustration. “My falling in love with Draco has nothing to do with you! My feelings for him are not a reflection of who you are. You’re not a fucking moron, and even if you were, it wouldn’t have been the reason why Draco and I got together. I thought we were moving past this, Ron. I thought you and Luna were together.”

“Luna and I...I don’t know. We might turn into something. Who knows?” Ron mumbled.

“You have to let me go, Ron. Luna could be good for you. After all this you should give her a real chance.”

They approached the basilisk skeleton. Ron reached forward and grasped one of the fangs. With a yank, he pulled it free. He held it out to Hermione. “You should do it.”

“What?”

“You have the cup, right? You haven’t destroyed one yet. You should do it.”

Hermione blinked. Could she do this? She hadn’t thought about it until this moment. The cup contained a piece of Voldemort’s soul. Was destroying it tantamount to murder? Perhaps just a seventh of a murder. She pulled the cup from her bag and held it in her hands. Her pulse quickened. She wanted to do it. She wanted to destroy it. No one deserved it more. The sudden blood-lust within her gave her pause. She had never thought she could be a killer, but in this moment she felt...excited.

She took the fang from Ron and held it over the cup. She thought inexplicably of Bellatrix Lestrange and her arm came down swiftly, the fang piercing the golden chalice.

There was an ear-splitting howl as the cup leaked a thick, black fluid. A swift gust burst forth from the horcrux, whipping her hair around her face. She pulled her arm back to shield her face. The howl broke, cracked into a wounded wail. Ron was covering his ears. The horcrux was twisting rapidly in an effort to escape, but she only drove the fang in deeper into the metal. The shriek faded and diminished with a gurgle. The metal split open, curling away from the puncture before contracting into a useless lump, destroyed.
The fang fell away from her hand and she hesitantly reached for the crumpled cup.

“Well done,” said Ron.

Hermione shrugged. “Well, I’m not a fucking moron,” she said with a slight grin.

Ron laughed. “If anyone ever thought that about you, Hermione, they would certainly qualify for a room in the psych ward at St. Mungo’s.”

Hermione laughed and stood up, brushing her hands off on her trousers. “Let’s take as many fangs as we can carry, yeah?”

With a nod, Ron began to pull fangs from the basilisk’s skull and Hermione put them in her beaded bag. She could tell he was still upset with her. She wondered if their friendship would ever recover. She knew he would eventually move on from his feelings for her, and perhaps he had already begun to. But would her relationship with Draco be the thing that prevented him from ever being her friend again? She wondered if there was any way she could help him see; if there was anyway to prove to him that Draco wasn’t the villain Ron believed him to be.

“I got pregnant,” she blurted out. She wasn’t sure why she was telling him. The words had fallen from her lips before she could stop them. Perhaps it was the wrong thing to say. Maybe Ron would blame Draco for her getting pregnant. But it was too late to take the words back now. Besides, she could think of no better way to prove to him that Draco wasn’t the villain Ron believed him to be.

Ron’s head snapped up, his blue eyes meeting hers in shock. “You...you’re...” he stammered.

Hermione shook her head. “No. I was...” she shifted her weight between her feet nervously. “But...after the Manor...”

Ron’s eyes were full of terror.

“Well, I lost it.”

Ron crossed the space between them in two quick steps and pulled her into a bone crushing hug. “I’m so sorry, Mione,” he mumbled against her hair. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Hermione wrapped her arms around her friend. “I don’t know. You and I haven’t exactly been on the best terms recently, and I was...embarrassed.” She pulled away from him to wipe away a tear. She shook her head, refusing to cry today. There were much more pressing issues right now; this was not the time for her emotions to be at the forefront.

She cleared her throat and turned away from him. “We should get back.” She began to walk toward the exit.

“Hermione,” called Ron.

She turned back.

“I really am sorry,” he said earnestly.

She smiled. “Thank you.”

~*~*~

The Slytherin common room was impossible to access without the password. There was no portrait to sweet talk into letting you in without it. He stood outside the innocuous wall for several moments,
whispering words he thought might possibly be the password without any luck.

With no other options, and nothing to lose, he did the only thing he could think of: he knocked.

He counted to ten slowly before knocking again louder. This time when he counted, he only made it to six before the entrance opened and he was staring at the shocked faces of his former classmates.

Blaise, Theo, Pansy, Crabbe and Goyle were all frowning at him.

“Draco,” Pansy breathed in apparent horror. “What are you doing here?”

“Can I come in?” Draco asked, putting on an air of what he hoped was easy confidence.

They all stood aside and allowed him to enter the room. It was dark, and these five seemed to be the only Slytherins left awake. Draco stood in the heart of the room in which he had once felt so at home, now feeling as out of place as a dragon in a dressing gown.

“I heard you were dead,” grunted Theo.

“Heard you betrayed the Dark Lord,” spat Goyle.

Draco stared at his friends. They looked fine. None of them were sporting black eyes or cut lips like the students in the Room of Requirement. They were obviously more accepted in the new Hogwarts regime. Perhaps he had made a mistake in coming here. They were not the type to stand against something so powerful, especially something that they likely agreed with on some level. Whatever had been asked of these students here that Longbottom and Finnigan had refused to do, the Slytherins before him had obliged. He searched for the right words to say to them. He was no good at speeches, and he had never attempted to sway anyone’s well-entrenched opinions before.

Suddenly, a pain shot through his arm. The Dark Mark had not burned like this since the Dark Lord had been called at Malfoy Manor. He felt his blood run cold. Potter must have been captured. At the very least he had been spotted. The Dark Lord was on his way. They were out of time.

“The Dark Lord is coming,” he announced without preamble.

Three of his friends looked very surprised at this news, Crabbe and Goyle did not. They must have taken the mark this year.

“Potter is here,” said Goyle questioningly.

Draco nodded.

“How do you know that?” Pansy asked.

“Because I came here with him,” Draco confessed.

Blaise and Theo exchanged looks. “You mean, all the rumors are true? You ran off with the Mudblood last year and have been with Potter all this time?” asked Blaise.

Draco shrugged. “That’s the short version, but yes.”

“Why?” Theo asked.

“Because I’m not my father. And I’m guessing that you aren’t yours either. Everything they taught us is bullshit. I refused to spend another day following that sadistic fucker. I didn’t want to be a sheep following a mad man to slaughter,” said Draco. The words were coming easier now.
“What are you doing here?” asked Crabbe.

“I’m hoping that you’ll join me. When the fighting starts, we need everyone we can get on our side.”

“You can’t be serious,” Pansy laughed condescendingly. Her blue eyes were cold and skeptical, as if wondering if the man in front of her was an imposter.

“I am,” Draco said firmly.

“You’re going to fight against your own parents?” Theo asked, raising one dark eyebrow.

Draco hesitated. He thought of the last time he had seen his parents; in and out of the Imperius curse, struggling against their love for him and their devotion to the Dark Lord. He imagined raising his mother’s wand against her in battle and watching her eyes dance between horror and glassy obedience.

“If I have to,” he said, hoping his voice wasn’t shaking as much as his nerves.

“You’re a filthy blood traitor,” Crabbe spat.

“I don’t care what you call me,” said Draco. “You’re not going to change my mind. You think the Dark Lord gives a shite about any of you?” He looked around at his friends. Crabbe and Goyle looked ready to kill. Blaise and Theo were frowning, hovering between angry and confused. Pansy had tears in her eyes.

“As if Potter cares about us,” Goyle scoffed.

“He would,” said Draco. “If you would fight with us. Pansy?”

She shook her head, her silky hair dancing over her shoulders. “I can’t, Draco.” Her voice shook. She took three tentative steps toward him. “We don’t have to fight,” she tried, her hand lifting to rest against his cheek. “We could go away. Just the two of us.”

Draco’s heart plummeted. It had been so long since he’d seen her, he hadn’t thought it was still possible for her to hold a flame for him. Her blue eyes were pleading, hopeful even, that he would take her hand and hold her as he once had. His stomach twisted with guilt. Of all the things he had done in his life, treating her as he had last year, breaking her heart, was one of the things he regretted most. She’d been a tad annoying at times, yes, but she was always a loyal friend to him. Her only mistake had been caring for him too much.

He stepped away from her and her hand dropped to her side. “I can’t,” he said, lowering his eyes so he wouldn’t have to see the look of pain on her face. When he raised his eyes again, she was crying. “I’m sorry,” he said earnestly. For everything.

He turned to the others. “Crabbe? Goyle?”

Crabbe spat at him. It flew through the air and landed against his sleeve.


They had their hands in their pockets and wouldn’t meet his eyes.

This had been a tremendous waste of time. He’d been foolish to believe any of them would join him. Six years of friendship be damned. What was that against the power of the Dark Lord?

“Fine. Just...please stay out of trouble. Be safe.”
He turned for the exit, half hoping that they would stop him and half hoping that they just let him leave without hexing him in the back.

None of them said a word.

As he walked through the darkened dungeon corridors, he cursed his own stupidity. He’d let Hermione run off with Weasley to Merlin knows where while he went on this fool’s errand. Now he had no idea where she was or if she was safe.

Draco stopped abruptly. The sound of thick soled shoes were echoing down the stone corridor. Someone was approaching rapidly. He quickly ducked behind a suit of armor as Slughorn rounded the corner. The plump wizard stopped outside the Slytherin common room, muttered the password and disappeared. A few moments later, he reappeared with the entirety of Slytherin house in tow.

Odd, Draco thought, as the students paraded in their dressing gowns down the corridor. His friends brought up the rear, and Pansy’s eyes found his in the darkness as she passed. She tore her heartbroken eyes away from him to stare resolutely ahead.

Draco waited for the group to pass before following at a safe distance. When they arrived at the entrance hall, he hung back, peeking around the corner to watch as all four heads of houses ushered their students into the great hall. The students were all in their pajamas, yawning and passing each other confused looks and comments.

After they had all gathered in the great hall, Draco inched forward, wondering if Potter’s presence here had anything to do with this late-night meeting.

“Malfoy,” came an urgent whisper.

Draco jumped and wheeled around. “Potter, what are you doing? You know the Dark Lord is coming right?”

Harry nodded. “I ran into the Carrows. And he’s already here, actually. The teachers have barricaded the school. What are you doing? I thought you’d be with Hermione.”

“I went to try to find us some more allies,” Draco explained.

“Any luck?”

Draco shook his head miserably.

“Have you seen Hermione and Ron?” Harry asked, craning his neck to look into the great hall.

“She said to meet them back at the Room of Requirement.”

“I’ve just come from there,” said Harry.

Draco tried not to worry. Perhaps their mission just took longer than expected. “Well, that’s where I’m headed. I’ll wait for her there.”

Harry nodded and began to pass the blonde into the Great Hall.

“What are you doing? They’ll see you!” Draco chided.

Harry just shrugged. “He already knows I’m here. What’s the difference?” He disappeared into the crowd of students, whispers and stares following him as he went.
With icy tendrils of dread reaching for his heart, Draco turned and hurried for the Room of Requirement. He was bounding up the staircase toward the second level when it happened.

There was a calm cold voice in the air, echoing through the halls. He wheeled around in terror, expecting to see the snake-like face of Lord Voldemort behind him, but he was alone. The voice was coming from nowhere and everywhere.

“I know that you are preparing to fight. Your efforts are futile. You cannot fight me. I do not want to kill you. I have great respect for the teachers of Hogwarts. I do not want to spill magical blood. Give me Harry Potter, and none shall be harmed. Give me Harry Potter, and I shall leave the school untouched. Give me Harry Potter, and you will be rewarded. You have until midnight.”

After nearly a year of running, it seemed the war had finally caught up with him. It was just outside, pounding at the gates of the school. It was inside the school, in the Great Hall, where surely someone had spotted Potter and was considering or suggesting turning him over. It was within each witch and wizard here, in their doubts and fears. He had to find Hermione right now.

“Draco!”

He turned sharply, pulling his wand. Blaise and Theo were approaching rapidly. “What do you want?” Draco asked. He didn’t have time to fight with them. They had less than an hour before the fighting began, and that was only if the Dark Lord kept his word and did not attack until midnight.

“We’re coming with you,” said Blaise.

“What?”

“My father’s a prick,” said Theo brusquely, clenching his fists at his sides. “I’d kill to see his face when he sees me fighting with Potter.”

“Well, you might have to,” Draco quipped.

“And I can’t let that sadistic fucker take over the world. I need my freedom,” said Blaise.

Draco reached into his pocket and fished out the Veritaserum. “I’m sorry, but I have to be sure you won’t betray us.” He held out a phial.

“You don’t trust us?” Theo smirked, taking the potion and uncorking it.

“Like I said, I just have to be sure. Just a sip should be enough.”

Theo took a tentative sip first before handing it over to Blaise, who hesitated for a moment before downing a few drops of the potion.

Draco waited for a moment for the potion to take effect. “Okay, tell me what happened last year after I left.”

“heard you ran off with Granger,” said Theo. His tone started jovial, but slowly became sterile.

“Snape took over the school and put the Carrows in charge of discipline. We had to practice the Cruciatus curse on first years.” Blaise shivered. Their voices were mechanical, emotionless. The potion was working.

“Will you fight against the Dark Lord?”

“Yes,” they both answered together.
“Will you betray me? Will you turn against Potter?”

“No,” they said in unison.

“Alright, that’s good enough for me. Come on. I should tell the Order that you’re on our side before you get hexed.” Draco turned, motioning for them to follow him up the stairs.

“Draco,” said Blaise, the emotion returning to his voice. “I did try to get Pansy to come. She’s scared.”

Draco shook his head. “It’s okay. She should get to safety while she still can.” He couldn’t blame anyone for wanting to run away from the war. He wished he could leave too, get as far away as he could before the fighting started; but he couldn’t leave Hermione, and she would never come with him if it meant leaving her friends in danger.

There were students coming down the corridor now. He looked for a place to hide, but then realized that it didn’t matter. The war was here, no one cared that he was too.

Hundreds of students were filing past them up the stairs, their eyes wide with fear. Some of the younger children were crying and clinging to each other. Teachers were shouting at them to stay close and walk calmly. No one seemed to notice him or pay him much mind.

“Come on, we need to get to the Room of Requirement,” said Draco.

“Well, just follow the hoard of kids. That’s where they’re headed to be evacuated,” Blaise grinned.

They all hurried up the stairs, pushing their way past a group of terrified first years. Ahead of him, he saw a gaggle of red-headed wizards. He craned his neck to find her mess of brown curls amongst them.

Bill and Fleur had arrived, along with Remus and his wife, and several other Weasleys and graduated Gryffindors. Bill waved at him as they approached. “Malfoy,” he greeted, shaking Draco’s hand.

Draco beckoned Blaise and Theo over. “This is Blaise and Theo. They’ve agreed, and promised under Veritaserum, to fight with us against the Dark Lord.”

“Brilliant!” Arthur Weasley said. “Happy to have you with us. We’ll spread the word so no one stuns you.”

Theo laughed. “I’d like to see them try!”

“Anyone seen Granger?” Draco asked. He tried to guess how much time had passed since he left Hermione. Had it been an hour? Where had they gone? How was it that he had happened across Potter, Blaise, Theo, and half the Order without seeing her?

The Order members all shook their heads. “Listen, we’ve got to check in with Minerva,” said Bill. “But if we see Hermione I’ll tell her where to find you, yeah?”

Draco nodded. “I’ll be here.”

The last of the students were disappearing into the Room of Requirement now and it was getting quiet. The Order members all disappeared down the corridor, leaving Draco alone with Blaise and Theo.
“Granger?” Blaise said, arching one dark eyebrow.

“Yeah,” Draco said shortly. He was past the point of caring what anyone thought about his relationship with Hermione. He just wanted to find her and make sure she was alright.

“Are you two...together?” Theo asked.

Draco turned his eyes to his friends. “Yes.” He silently challenged them to say something.

Blaise chuckled. “Never thought I’d see the day. They really brainwashed you.”

“Actually, I was brainwashed before. I see things very clearly now.”

His heart leapt. Hermione and Weasley were rounding the corner. Her eyes met his and she broke into a grin. They hurried to meet each other. He took her face in his hands and kissed her hard. “Are you alright?” he asked, his eyes dancing over her face in search of injury.

“I’m fine,” she insisted. She looked past him at the other two Slytherins. “I see you had some luck.”

Blaise and Theo were looking at her as if they were just seeing her properly for the first time.

“I did. How about you?”

Weasley held up the crumpled remains of the horcrux. “Hermione destroyed it.”

“How?” Draco asked.

Hermione reached into her bag and pulled out a basilisk fang. “Keep one with you in case you come across another.”

“What the bloody hell is going on?” Theo asked.

Draco took the fang from her and put it in his pocket. “Nothing you need to concern yourself with. But if you get the chance to kill the Dark Lord’s snake, do it.”

“You sure we can trust them?” Weasley asked.

“As sure as you can trust me, Weasley,” replied Draco.

The redhead frowned, peering past Hermione into the Room of Requirement where the last of the students were disappearing down the tunnel and his sister was pacing anxiously. “Yeah, well, I’m still making up my mind about that.”

Then, from far below them, the sound of shouts and explosions began to echo through the stone halls.

The attack had begun.

Chapter End Notes

Y’all should follow me on tumblr (HGinny25) and spam the crap out of my ask box with questions and comments about me and my story. I’d love that.
If you feel so inclined, you should leave me a review! I hope you liked it!
The Death Eaters had made it into the castle, and the screams and blasts from below were growing louder. Theo turned to Draco. “I’m going to find my father. Can’t wait to see the look on his face.” He was grinning like a loon, his brown eyes glinting mischievously. “You coming?”

Draco shook his head. “We have to wait for Potter. I’ll see you later.” Even as he said it, he realized that he couldn’t promise such a thing. Any of them could be killed at any time now.

“I’ll go with you, Theo,” said Blaise. He turned his dark eyes towards Draco. “Be careful, yeah?”

“You too.”

Draco’s friends gave him reassuring smiles before running down the corridor.

“Blaise! Theo!” Draco called. They turned back. “Thank you!”

The two boys grinned at him and waved before they disappeared down the stairs. The reality of battle seemed to have not yet settled for the two Slytherins who had just decided to fight for the light.

“Where the hell is Harry?” Weasley asked.

“I saw him in the Great Hall just before the Dark Lord’s little announcement,” said Draco.

“You don’t think someone gave him up, do you?” Hermione worried, chewing on her bottom lip.

“With the castle swarming with Gryffindors? Not bloody likely,” Draco said reassuringly. “Ah! See? Here’s the wonder boy now!”

Harry was barrelling toward them up the corridor. “I know where it is!” he announced. He hurried past them and into the Room of Requirement, where a few people were exiting the tunnel.

“Is the tunnel clear?” Harry asked an older woman who was pulling her wand from her sleeve. She was wearing a ridiculous vulture hat that seemed familiar to Draco, though he could not quite place it.

“Yes,” she said. “The students have all left. I was the last through. Have you seen my grandson?”

“There’s fighting below. Last time I saw him, that’s where he was,” replied Harry.

“Good. The Longbottoms have never strayed far from battle when we could avoid it. He has his
father’s spirit.” The woman brushed the front of her robes proudly before exiting the room.

Longbottom! That’s where he had seen the vulture hat before. He recalled it perched atop Severus Snape’s head in his third year. A boggart subjected to humiliation by one Neville Longbottom. Draco grinned as the hat, and its owner, disappeared beyond the door.

Ginny came forward frowning, fists clenched and red faced with ire. “My parents are keeping me hostage in here! They said I’m too young to fight.”

“You’re underage,” remarked Harry.

“But—”

“I’m not going to tell you it’s okay to go out there to get yourself killed,” Harry insisted. “We need the room, though. Wait outside.”

The redhead’s eyes lit up and she placed a kiss on Harry’s cheek before flouncing out of the room.

“Don’t go far!” Weasley yelled after her, but she was already sprinting down the hallways toward the battle.

“Mum’s gonna kill me,” he grumbled.

Harry ushered them out of the room again and closed the door. He began to pace back and forth, muttering quietly under his breath.

“He hid it here?” Hermione balked.

The door was changing. Instead of a simple wooden door, it was the ornate arched doorway that Draco had walked through countless times. His blood ran cold. He should have known. He should have realized that the perfect place to hide something in Hogwarts was the room where he had hidden himself away for the majority of the previous year.

Harry opened the door and motioned for them to enter after him. Hermione and Weasley hurried in, but Draco stood outside a moment longer before following apprehensively.

The door closed behind them, throwing the quartet into darkness. “Lumos Maxima,” said Draco, a ball of bright light erupting from his wand to hover high above them. It lit the room in an eerie glow, casting sinister shadows across their faces.

Harry led the group into the room where they ventured into a labyrinth of chairs, books, lamps, broomsticks, and weapons all piled nearly to the top of the high, vaulted ceiling. They walked for about a hundred metres before the scarred wizard stopped. They had reached a small clearing with four paths, not including the one they had just come down, leading out. “I think we should split up. We’ll find the Horcrux faster that way. If you find it send up some sparks. I actually saw it last year, but didn’t know what it was. It was on a bust near a bunch of other jewelry. The diadem is small, silver with blue stones, and it has the Ravenclaw motto etched into it. You know, ‘wit beyond measure’,” explained Harry.

“I’ll start this way.” Draco said as he started down the path straight ahead.

He walked the familiar course toward the Vanishing Cabinet, keeping his eyes peeled for a bust wearing a tiara. After a couple of minutes, the sounds of his companions footsteps faded away. He was alone.
The passageway was getting narrower. Lost and forgotten items were piled high in precarious stacks that leaned over the path. Several times, Draco had to duck to avoid hitting his head on a lamp or desk that was jutting out over the passage.

The Vanishing Cabinet loomed before him. The door was still ajar from when the Death Eaters had come through it nearly a year ago. He could hear his heartbeat pounding in his ears as he approached it.

He had spent the better part of the past year regretting all of his choices. The choice to take the mark to try to redeem his father, the choice to let the Death Eaters into the castle, the choice to try to kill Albus Dumbledore. But now, thinking back, he couldn’t bring himself to regret them anymore.

He thought back to the moment in the forbidden forest, Hermione’s eyes wide and teary. Everything could be traced back to that moment. All of his horrible choices had led him to that moment with the curly haired Gryffindor, and that moment had eventually led him here. And despite the fact that they would all likely be dead before dawn, he felt...lucky. Lucky that Hermione had been there that night, lucky that she’d run away with him, and lucky that she believed in him, defended him, vouched for him, saved him.

He reached forward, placing his hand on the cool, dark wooden door of the cabinet that had starred in his nightmares for months, before closing it with a smile, turning his back on that period of his life.

A sudden clattering behind him caused him to jump. He wheeled around, wand trained on the dark path he’d walked down moments ago. “Potter?” he called quietly.

A dark chuckle was the only reply. Draco’s stomach plummeted as Crabbe and Goyle emerged from the dark path. “Didn’t think we were going to be able to just let you go, did ya?” Crabbe growled.

“The Dark Lord would love to have a chat with you. And with you on Potter’s side now, we figured you’d lead us straight to him. I guess we were right,” Goyle said, fixing his wand on Draco.

“Where’s your boyfriend then, eh, Malfoy?” Crabbe jeered.

“I’m alone,” said Draco. He couldn’t hear his companions in the large junk room, and he only hoped that he could convince Crabbe and Goyle that they were not here. How fast could he stun them? Which one should he stun first? Goyle was quicker, but Crabbe was more ruthless and stronger with his spell work. “Are you really naive enough to think that you two can get the best of me? I’ve always been a stronger dueler.”

They were closing in on him now, backing him into a corner. “Maybe,” said Crabbe. “But we’ve learned a few tricks this year, haven’t we Goyle?”

“I THINK I FOUND IT!” came a shout from the next aisle over. Crabbe and Goyle’s heads shot up. Damned Gryffindor exuberance, thought Draco.

“He’s here,” Goyle grunted excitedly. He turned quickly to run in the direction Potter’s voice had come from.

Draco fired a stunning spell at him, but missed and hit a plush chair, which exploded into a puff of upholstery and stuffing. Crabbe returned fire on Draco. The blonde threw himself further down the path and out of sight. “POTTER!” he roared as Crabbe and Goyle tore off in search of their valuable target. He blasted a clearing in the wall of artifacts before him and scrambled toward the place where Harry’s voice had sounded a moment ago.
“Draco?” Hermione called from the distance, her voice high with panic.

“Granger!” Draco shouted. He raced down the narrow corridors, every now and then catching a sight of Crabbe and Goyle as they darted through the labyrinth.

“It’s that Mudblood! Avada Kedavra!” He heard Crabbe bellow. There was a high shriek and a flash of green to his left.

“No!” he cried, barrelling through into a clearing where he just saw Hermione’s mass of curls disappearing behind a wardrobe to his left.

“Stupefy!” Draco yelled. The spell hit in the center of Goyle’s broad back and the boy dropped to the floor. Crabbe vanished down a path to his right.

Potter ran up behind him as Hermione peeked out from behind the wardrobe. “Where’s Ron?” he asked, his green eyes terrified.

From the distant bowels of the room they heard Ron screaming, not in pain, but in terror. His hurried footsteps were approaching rapidly. An eerie orange glow was rising behind him. “Run!” he shouted as he came into view. “RUN!”

A massive wall of flames shot up to the ceiling and crashed down like a tidal wave, crushing desks and books and incinerating everything in its path. A burst of heat hit Draco in the face as Ron reached them. The flames rose again, this time taking the form of a dragon. It swooped and roared, crashing over a mountain of chairs before rising again as a giant snake. With a hiss it lurched forward and wrapped around a stack of books.

They all bolted for the exit. Draco paused, his eyes landing on the crumpled form of his old friend. He couldn’t just leave him here to be burned alive. Casting a quick feather light charm, he hoisted Goyle up and dragged him toward the doors.

“Leave him!” shouted Weasley.

“I can’t!” Draco yelled. Even with the charm, dragging Goyle was cumbersome. He stumbled over his own feet. Weasley groaned in frustration before turning back. He grabbed Goyle under one of his arms and helped Draco pull him along.

“What about the Horcrux?” Hermione panted as they ran.

“I have it,” barked Harry. “Just run!”

The flames were closing in around them now. Would they be able to reach the exit before being overtaken? They made a sharp turn toward the doors and scrambled to a halt. A wall of fire was rising above them, blocking their path to the door. They turned back to see the ominous glow behind them as well. They were trapped.

“Here!” shouted Potter.

Draco turned to see Harry tossing him a broom. He caught it and mounted it. Next to him, Hermione swung her leg over Harry’s broom to ride with him. Ron pulled the unconscious Goyle onto his broom, holding onto the boy as he kicked into the air. They all took flight and sped toward the doors.

Rapid movement below caught Draco’s eye and he looked down. Crabbe was below, shaking his wand which was spurting the wicked flames at an alarming rate. He was encircled in fire, his frightened eyes darting around in search of exit.
“You have to help him,” Hermione called.

Draco nodded and dove, weaving past burning lanterns and old draperies. Draco reached for Crabbe’s hand, but the boy’s palm was too sweaty and it slipped through his fingers. He pulled up and circled to go again.

Draco was diving a second time when it happened. Crabbe threw his wand, which was still spewing flames, away from himself. It exploded, engulfing Crabbe in a blaze of enchanted flames. Draco pulled back, hoping to see his childhood friend once the flames ebbed, but they never did. Crabbe was gone.

“Come on!” yelled Potter.

With one last glance at the inferno where Crabbe had just stood, Draco turned his broom toward the exit. He dodged flames and falling towers of furniture before bursting through the doorway. He tumbled from his broom and gasped as cool, clean air rushed into his lungs. Harry held the diadem in his hands. Draco scrambled to his feet and snatched it from him and threw it back into the Room of Requirement where it was swallowed up by flames. There was an awful screech and an eruption of swirling black smoke as the Horcrux disintegrated into ash.

Hermione flicked her wand at the doors which slammed closed with a thud.

“That must have been Fiendfyre. It’s one of the few things that can destroy Horcruxes. I never would have tried it myself. It’s too hard to control,” said Hermione, her voice trembling. She had a smudge of ash on her cheek and one of her sleeves was badly singed, but she looked unharmed.

Weasley rolled Goyle off the broom where he landed gracelessly on the stone floor. “So now it’s just the snake, right?” asked Weasley.

Potter nodded. “And it will be with Voldemort, mark my words.”

They all exchanged glances. Killing the snake meant confronting the Dark Lord head on. They now had to battle their way out of the castle, past dozens or even hundred of Death Eaters, giants, dementors, and werewolves, only to confront the most dangerous wizard of the century. Draco suddenly craved the relative safety of their Horcrux hunt thus far.

The battle had reached them. There were shouts and bangs coming from just down the corridor. Two Weasleys were backing into view, their red hair giving away their identities, firing spells at two Death Eaters. Harry, Ron, and Hermione all rushed forward to help and Draco joined them. One of the Death Eater’s hoods slipped away.

“Hello, Minister!” one of the Weasleys shouted, firing a spell at the gaunt man, who dropped his wand and clutched at his chest in pain. “Did I mention I’m resigning?”

The other Weasley, who Draco recognized as either Fred or George, laughed. “Perce! You’re joking! You’re actually joking!” The Death Eater he was battling collapsed as he was hit by three Stunning Spells.

There was a sudden explosion, the force of which Draco felt thud in his chest like a punch. He was thrown through the air with the others, and smashed against the wall. Head spinning, he stood up. Three redheaded wizards were across from him, all groaning in pain. The wall behind them swayed precariously.

“LOOK OUT!” Draco shouted.
The three of them looked up at the looming danger and scrambled to get to safety. Before they could all get clear of the danger, the wall suddenly pitched forward and crumbled, massive stones landing on top of the Weasley twin.

Chapter End Notes

I know, I know, I'm so mean. What a wicked cliffhanger to leave it on. Is Fred dead? Is he alive? Let me know what you think in the reviews! The next chapter will be longer. And hopefully will be up within a week or two!
When the dust cleared, and all the stones had fallen, all Draco could hear was Fred Weasley screaming in agony. He had nearly escaped the wall, but one of the giant stones had landed directly on his left leg, and he was writhing in pain. Draco winced at the guttural screams and sobs Fred was making as Percy levitated the stone off of his brother, his wand hand shaking badly.

Fred's leg had been badly crushed. His bones must have been shattered, and *Merlin*, the blood…

Hermione rushed forward to help him, but Draco knew that there was nothing to be done. Even with magic, Fred would lose his leg.

More Death Eaters were upon them now. They could hear the sounds of battle growing closer again. Shouted curses, people crying out in pain, explosions as spells missed their human targets and contacted the stone walls; they were all growing louder now.

“We have to move,” said Harry. “Now.”

There was a thunderous sound coming up the corridor, as if a stampede of hundreds of feet were sprinting towards them. Suddenly, dozens of gigantic, furry monsters were scurrying up the corridor; acromantulas, hungry for blood.

Hermione let out a shriek. Ron and Percy hoisted Fred off the floor, his shattered leg dangling uselessly. He cried out in pain as his leg swung beneath him.
The group hurried down the nearest stairs and darted into a classroom as the spiders trampled past.

Ron and Percy set Fred on the ground as softly as they could, though he was still screaming loudly, obviously in agony. If they didn’t get him to quiet down soon, he would surely give their position away to any passing Death Eaters.

“Hermione,” said Draco. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the dittany and the pain relieving potion. She took both from him and poured the pain potion into Fred’s screaming mouth. He knew it wouldn’t help much, but he just hoped it took the edge off a little. He wished he had grabbed some Skele-gro from Slughorn’s stores, but it’s such a slow acting potion that Draco had thought it wouldn’t be of much use.

“I think he might have severed his femoral artery,” said Hermione. She was ripping away the leg of Fred’s trousers. She used her wand to cut it into a long ribbon.

“What does that mean?” asked Ron.

“How do you know that?” mumbled Percy, dropping to his knees next to his brother.

“It’s the major artery in your leg,” Hermione explained to Ron. She wrapped the ribbon around and around Fred’s thigh, just above a particularly nasty gash. She tied a knot in it and pulled it tight. Fred yelled out and cursed at the jerky motion. “He could bleed out. I studied basic anatomy and healing when Draco and I were first on the run. I figured it would come in handy.”

“Is he going to die?” asked Harry, his voice trembling.

Hermione was dropping the dittany over the wound. She murmured a couple of spells before setting down her wand.

“The bleeding is slowing down. I don’t think he’ll bleed out,” said Hermione.

After a few moments, Fred’s screams subsided into groans. He was sweating profusely and his entire body was trembling.
“He’s going into shock,” said Percy. “If we don’t get him some real medical attention soon he’ll be in big trouble.”

“Should we just stun him? It might help with the pain,” suggested Ron. He was white in the face.

Percy bit his lip. “It might help. We could try it. He still needs a healer soon though. That leg might turn septic.”

“Do it,” Fred said through gritted teeth. “Put me out.”

“Fred, if we don’t get you to a healer, then you might not wake up,” warbled Percy in horror.

“I’ll be fine. Just stun me.” He was ghostly white now.

Percy nodded, giving in to Fred’s request, and raised his wand to stun his brother.

Fred’s shivering stopped as he went limp. He was so pale, any passers by might think he was dead.

“Harry, we still have to get to the snake,” said Hermione. She was trembling, and her eyes were teary.

“What? Oh, yeah. Where do you think…?”

“Look into his mind, Harry,” suggested Hermione.

Harry’s green eyes met hers in surprise. “What?”

“That way you’ll know where he is,” she clarified.
Harry nodded apprehensively. He took a deep breath before closing his eyes in concentration.

“Are you okay?” Hermione asked as Draco walked back over to the trio of Gryffindors.

He nodded. He tried not to look at Fred’s leg, or think about his awful screams. He tried not to think of the look on Crabbe’s face just before the flames had engulfed him. There would be a time to mourn Crabbe, but this was not it.

Hermione slipped her hand into his and gave it a reassuring squeeze.

“Thanks for your help back there, Weasley,” Draco said. “With Goyle, I mean.”

Ron looked up from his brother’s prone form in surprise. “Don’t mention it.”

“I know where he is,” Harry announced, opening his green eyes. Beads of sweat had formed on his brow and he was panting slightly.

“Where?” Weasley asked.

“The Shrieking Shack. Malfoy, your father was there. He went to get Snape. The snake is with him.”

“Did you see my mother?” asked Draco.

Harry shook his head. “Just Lucius and Voldemort.”

“Let’s go!” exclaimed Hermione.

“What about Fred?” asked Ron.

“I’ll look after him,” said Percy. “I know you lot have a job to do. Go do it. We’ll be fine.”
Ron nodded, but looked hesitant to leave his brothers.

“Go,” Percy urged them.

“Take care of yourself,” said Harry. He and the other three then left the classroom, locking the door behind them.

They hurried down the stairs, all the while hoping that they wouldn’t encounter any more acromantulas. As they reached the second floor, a foreboding coldness swept over them. Stomach thick with dread, Draco saw at least a dozen Dementors bearing down on them. They reached out their skeletal hands for them, opening their gaping mouths for a kiss.

“Expecto Patronum!” cried Harry. Perhaps because he had just delved into the Dark Lord’s mind, or perhaps because he had just witnessed a friend nearly die, his Patronus was feeble and weak, barely a mist, and it dissipated almost immediately. He tried again with even less success.

Draco raised his wand. I can do this, he thought. He just needed a happy memory. He thought back to a few hours ago. Hermione’s gentle hand on his cheek, her eyes kind and reassuring as she said ’I believe in you. I love you.’

I believe in you.

I love you.


With a deep breath, Draco turned to Hermione. “Did you do that?” he asked.

Her eyes were shining again, her mouth open in shock. “No. It was you,” she breathed.

Draco looked at his wand. He’d done it, and it was an otter...just like hers.
He was knocked backwards as Hermione threw her arms around his neck. He pulled her against him, burying his face in her curls. “You were brilliant,” she breathed to him.

She pulled back just enough to kiss him full on the mouth. He pulled her closer by the waist, nearly lifting her off the ground as he kissed her back earnestly.

“Oi, is now the time?” came Harry’s voice.

“Sorry, mate,” Draco grinned as Hermione pulled away from him, blushing. Now might be the only time. He pushed the thought away.

They all continued down the corridors on their way to the entrance hall. They slowed down as they approached it, hearing the unmistakable screams and shouted hexes of gruesome fighting. The smell of blood and burning rubble filled the air. It seemed that this was the heart of the battle. Peeking around the corner, Draco saw about two dozen Order members locked in battle with at least forty Death Eaters. He looked around quickly for his mother, but did not see her. He saw Theo and Blaise locked in battle with three large, masked Death Eaters.

He turned to Hermione, who seemed to know what he was going to say before he said it.

“I have to help them. They’re in this fight because of me,” he explained.

She nodded. “I know. I have to go with Harry.”

Draco’s stomach twisted. Going with Harry meant going to Voldemort.

“Don’t worry. I won’t let him do anything stupid. Not yet, at least.” She smiled at him, and he wished he could pause that moment forever.

“Be safe,” he said.

“I will. Good luck.” She kissed him hard and long, like she didn’t want to pull away. When she did,
she murmured, “I love you,” and he realized that she was saying goodbye.

His throat restricted painfully, but he forced himself to repeat the words back to her before she disappeared under the Invisibility Cloak with Harry and Ron.

Had someone cursed a hole in his chest? Surely it shouldn’t hurt like this, just leaving her. Keeping her by his side wouldn’t make her any safer, but at least that way they would be together. If she were to die, would it be better to be with her when it happened? To watch the life leave her perfect eyes? Or would it be better to be apart? Not have to witness the event, but forever wonder if there were a way he could have saved her? It didn’t matter now. She’d gone. And all he could do now is hope and pray. Pray to some deity he had never believed in that she would be safe and come back to him unharmed. He wanted to stay rooted to this spot, just in case she changed her mind, decided she couldn’t be parted from him, and returned. Instead, he forced himself around the corner and into the entrance hall.

He stunned two Death Eaters before anyone had noticed his presence. “Hey!” shouted Theo with a grin. “Look who’s here!”

“I couldn’t let you prats take all the glory,” joked Draco as he dodged a hex from a beefy Death Eater.

Draco watched as Blaise petrified a masked dueler who had been about to curse Remus Lupin. The sandy haired man turned to Blaise in shock, gave an appreciative nod and returned to battle.

Draco fell into dueling a tall, thin Death Eater. He was bolstered by the fact that the Dark Lord had not yet entered the battle. His father was not here, and it seemed that his mother was not either. He would not have to worry about facing them yet. His main concern now was running into Bellatrix.

His main goal in the war had been to just survive and ensure Hermione’s survival, but faced with the prospect of dueling Bellatrix, he couldn’t deny his desire to watch her die slowly. He wanted to kill her, or at least have the pleasure of watching the life drain from her body. Anything to keep her from harming Hermione again.

A quick survey of the Death Eaters in the entrance hall proved that Bellatrix was not here. Perhaps she was elsewhere in the castle, but more likely she was somewhere close to the Dark Lord, waiting for him to need her for some special mission that would never come.
“Avada--” a thin Death Eater began, his wand trained on Remus Lupin.

“Stupefy!” cried Theo and Blaise together. The Death Eater crumpled under the force of the dual Stunning Spells.

“Thanks!” said Lupin jovially, unphased by how close he had come to death.

Dementors swept into the hall, but Draco, bolstered by his recent success, produced a Patronus. The otter scampered around, barrelling down Dementors before fading away. He stunned three more Death Eaters.

He was feeling very confident now. His mother’s wand had accepted him and was performing at least as well as his old wand had. He could achieve a Patronus due to Hermione’s love for him. He looked around and saw that the Order members now seemed to outnumber the Death Eaters. Perhaps they had a chance.

“Hello, little Malfoy,” a cruel voice hissed.

Blood running cold, Draco turned to stare into the sadistic, yellow eyes of Fenrir Greyback.

“You took off with my little snack last month,” Greyback sneered, running his tongue along his pointed teeth. “Where’s your girlfriend? I’d love to finish the job.”

With a rush of rage, Draco shot a Stunning Spell at the werewolf, but it was blocked easily. Draco tried again, and again, but none of his spells managed to hit their target. He was too angry to duel with a level head, and he lost any chance he might have had of ending this duel quickly. Greyback took over the attack, advancing on Draco like the predator he was. Draco deflected spell after spell, but had to back away from the gruesome creature.

His back eventually hit stone and there was nothing left to do but throw up a shield charm as Greyback cast the Cruciatus Curse. The shield absorbed the curse, but burst apart from the force of it.

Greyback stood before him with a wicked grin. “Don’t worry, I won’t kill you. That would ruin all the fun of making you watch me sink my teeth into her pretty little neck. Think of how she’ll scream. I’ll have to take my time. Can’t get too excited and kill her fast. That would ruin all the fun.”
“Avada Kedavra!” The words had ripped from his throat before he could even think. The voice that had said them hadn’t even sounded like his own, but there was no doubt that it was his curse, for in the next moment a green jet erupted from his wand. Greyback’s eyes lit up with surprise as the spell connected with his chest, and then they went blank and lifeless.

His body went limp and he fell back with a thump on the stone floor. Dead.

Draco blinked. He had just killed someone. He was a murderer. He looked around. No one seemed to have noticed.

Swallowing thickly, he stepped around the body of the fallen Death Eater and retreated to the Great Hall. There was more fighting happening here. He recognized several Gryffindor students, including Seamus Finnigan and Dean Thomas locked in battle with Rabastan and Rodolphus Lestrange. He raised his wand to defend himself against an oncoming attack from McNair, who was running toward him, but his throat was tight, and the words didn’t come.

There was a flash of red, and Draco blacked out.

~*~*~

“Draco, mate, you alright?”

His head hurt. His chest hurt. Everything hurt. But he was alive.

He opened his eyes to see Theo and Blaise looking down at him. He was laying flat on his back in what appeared to be a badly damaged classroom. “What happened?” he asked hoarsely.

“McNair just stunned you. I think he wanted to take you to the Dark Lord. Started dragging your body after he hexed you. Blaise petrified him and we brought you here to make sure you were alright,” explained Theo.

Draco sat up with a groan. They had brought him to the closest classroom on the first floor. The battle was still raging just outside the doors. “Thanks,” he said. He rolled his stiff neck.
“You should take a minute. No need to go back out there yet,” said Blaise.

Draco stood up, determined to return to battle, but stumbled into a nearby desk.

“I wish we had some potions to help you. I’m sure Madame Pomfrey has some, but…” Blaise began.

“I’m not a priority,” said Draco. “I’ll be f--”

“You have fought valiantly."

The cold, high voice on the air had returned. All three young boys jumped and raised their wands in defense. They were alone, and yet Lord Voldemort’s voice was as clear as if he were standing in their midst. The sounds of battle outside the door died down and Draco knew that everyone, Order and Death Eater alike, was listening intently. Had Harry been captured? Killed?

“Lord Voldemort knows how to value bravery. Yet you have sustained heavy losses. If you continue to resist me, you will all die, one by one. I do not wish this to happen. Every drop of magical blood spilled is a loss and a waste. Lord Voldemort is merciful. I command my forces to retreat immediately. You have one hour. Dispose of your dead with dignity. Treat your injured. I speak now, Harry Potter, directly to you.”

He was alive then, and had remained undetected. Draco could only hope that Hermione was safe as well.

“You have permitted your friends to die for you rather than face me yourself. I shall wait for one hour in the Forbidden Forest. If, at the end of that hour, you have not come to me, have not given yourself up, then battle recommences. This time, I shall enter the fray myself, Harry Potter, and I shall find you, and I shall punish every last man, woman, and child who has tried to conceal you from me. One hour.”

Draco crossed to the door and pulled it open. Blaise and Theo followed him back to the entrance hall, where Death Eaters were exiting the doors and filing across the courtyard.

“To the Great Hall!” shouted McGonagall.
Potter’s forces made their way through the large doors. Some were limping badly, others were holding injured arms, and some were carrying unconscious comrades. Draco followed them, searching the room for Hermione.

Madam Pomfrey seemed to be setting up a triage unit on the East wall of the Great Hall. She was covered in blood, running between injured students, teachers, and Order members. Wounded soldiers were crying and screaming, while the lone healer bustled along, trying to determine which injuries warranted the most immediate attention.

After a few moments, Percy Weasley entered, an unconscious Fred levitating behind him. Madam Pomfrey, seeing his badly injured leg, tended to him immediately. She performed multiple healing spells and used several potions. All the while, red headed witches and wizards were gathering around, all crying and clinging to each other as they watched her try to save Fred's leg.

Draco had never seen such death and destruction. The sounds of pain and grief were all around him. It was chaos. Survivors were carrying the bodies of the fallen into the Hall. The section of injured witches and wizards was growing rapidly, as was the number of bodies being brought to the opposite side of the Hall.

Suddenly, Ron brushed past him to stand with his family, all of them eagerly awaiting Fred’s prognosis.

Draco turned quickly to see Hermione standing next to Potter. She was taking in the scene around her with teary eyes.

He ran over to her and she threw her arms around his neck. “Are you alright?” she asked.

Draco nodded. “You?”

“I’m fine.” She was trembling. “Snape’s dead,” she breathed. “Voldemort killed him.”

Draco processed this news. Why would the Dark Lord kill Snape? The professor had always been a loyal servant to Voldemort. It didn’t make any sense.

Potter looked shaken. Perhaps the Dark Lord’s words had gotten to him.
Suddenly, an anguished cry echoed through the cavernous hall, drowning out all of the other wounded sobs and shaking Draco to his core. He turned to see Remus Lupin throwing himself onto the body of a mousy haired witch. He pulled her body into his chest and cradled her against him, weeping openly.

“Tonks,” Hermione breathed in horror, silent tears rolling down her cheeks. Draco could see her chest heaving in panicked breaths, and pulled her into his chest protectively.

“It’s going to be okay,” he murmured against her hair.

Hermione shook her head and pushed him away. “No, it’s not. Look around, Draco. It’s not okay.”

He reached for her hand to comfort her, but she stepped away from him.

“I’m sorry,” she gasped, her voice breaking. She wiped her eyes quickly. “I know you’re just trying to help. I just…” she trailed off, her glassy eyes looking around the room. “I’m going to help Madam Pomfrey with the injured.”

He watched her wander off in search of someone, anyone she could save in the world that was dying around her.

Draco turned to greet Harry, but the bespectacled wizard was gone. Draco had nothing to do but look around at the fallen witches and wizards. Seeing Lupin’s grief over the woman he loved forced a horrible feeling of foreboding into Draco’s heart. She’d just had a baby. A new mother should not be ripped from this world so ruthlessly. It wasn’t fair.

He turned away from the row of the dead to look toward the hoards of the injured. His eyes found Hermione’s mass of brown curls. She was tending to a Ravenclaw who looked like he had been hit in the shoulder by a particularly bad severing charm. His arm was barely attached to his body and the blood was pooling beneath him rapidly. Hermione’s lips were moving fast as she murmured healing spells. Her hands and robes were covered in blood, and when she wiped her brow, it smeared across her forehead. Seeing her covered in blood reminded him horribly of the night that she had been tortured.

His stomach twisted painfully at the memory, but he shook his head. He couldn’t think about that right now. His only goal was to keep himself and Hermione alive, and he couldn’t do that if he was
distracted by their past close calls.

A hand suddenly clapped him on the shoulder and he jumped slightly.

“Sorry,” a meek voice came from next to him. Draco turned to see Neville Longbottom. He frowned, wondering why the Gryffindor would be talking to him.

“It’s a lot to take in isn’t it?” Longbottom said, gesturing to the chaos of the Great Hall around them. Draco didn’t answer. “Some of us are bringing the dead to the Hall. If you’re willing, we could use some help. I think it’ll help to keep busy. Beats the hell out of just standing around waiting to die.”

Draco nodded before he could really think about it. “Yeah, fine.”

With a final fleeting glance at Hermione, he exited the Great Hall behind Longbottom. He didn’t want to leave her, but he knew she would be safe for now.

For at least half an hour, they walked back and forth, delivering the dead to the Great Hall. They didn’t speak much, only saying what was necessary. Draco knew that the Dark Lord’s allotted hour was almost up. Any minute now, the battle would resume. How many more bodies would litter these halls before it was over?

Longbottom cursed, pulling Draco from his reverie. There was a dead Gryffindor lying at the bottom of the grand staircase, the red and gold of his tie standing out against the black of his robes. He was young, much too young to have been fighting. Neville shook his head regretfully. “I’ll bring him in. There’s more in the courtyard if you want to head on.”

Draco nodded and exited the doors into the cool night air, but hushed voices in the entrance hall stopped him. He turned back and saw Potter talking to Longbottom. Potter was pale, his brow furrowed slightly, and was holding his invisibility cloak.

“Are you alright, Harry?” Longbottom was asking, “You’re not going to the forest, are you?”

“No, I’m fine. This is just part of the plan. I have something I need to do.” Harry wouldn’t meet Neville’s eyes. “Listen, Neville, Ron and Hermione already know this, but in case they’re…busy…or something, I need you to kill the snake.”
“The snake?”

“Yes, Voldemort’s snake. The one he keeps with him. He calls her Nagini. It’s important. Kill the snake, Neville.”

Longbottom nodded. “Alright, Harry. You sure you’re alright?”

Harry nodded, “I’m fine. Thanks, Nev.” He turned away from Longbottom and made his way through the doors and onto the courtyard.

Draco blocked his path. “You don’t have a plan, do you, Potter?” he said accusingly.

Harry squared his shoulders. “No, I do.”

“And does that plan involve walking into the forest and giving yourself up?”

Harry didn’t answer; he just stared at Draco for a moment. “Don’t try to stop me,” he said evenly.

Draco put his hands in his pockets and nodded slowly. “So this is how it all ends, huh? All these followers, people who believe in you, and this is how it will end?”

“It isn’t the end for them, only for me,” said Harry.

“Why not fight?”

“I don’t have time to explain. This is the way it needs to be, Malfoy. There’s no other way. Trust me.”

Draco scoffed. He looked behind Harry to the doors leading to the Great Hall, where he knew Hermione was doing her best to save as many lives as she could. “At least say goodbye to her.”
“She would never let me go.”

It was true. Draco knew that if Hermione was aware of what her friend was about to do, there was nothing that could stop her from marching into the forest after him and getting herself killed too. Yes, she would go with him knowing that it meant her death. She would go with him and give up her life for no other reason than it would mean that Harry wasn’t alone.

“Don’t let her do anything stupid when…when it happens,” said Harry. “Get her to safety as soon as you can. Take care of her, Malfoy.”

“You know I will,” Draco affirmed.

Harry held out his hand and Draco shook it. “I’m glad Hermione has you. And for what it’s worth, Malfoy, you would have made a good Gryffindor.”

“I consider that an insult.” Draco smirked slightly and released Harry’s hand. “But thanks.”

Harry offered him a tight smile and then walked past him.

“Potter,” Draco called. The scarred wizard turned back, his green eyes meeting Draco’s grey ones. “It’s been an honor.”

Harry grinned. “Don’t get all soft on me now, Malfoy.” His grin slipped from his mouth and he turned, pulling on his invisibility cloak as he headed toward the forest.

Draco’s stomach twisted as he turned back to the castle doors. Potter was marching into the forest to die, and all Draco could do was let him go. Should he let him go? Should he turn around and chase after Potter? Stun him and hide him away until after the snake was killed and the Boy Who Lived could finally duel to the death with a chance of survival?

No. Potter had been adamant. For some reason that Draco may never know, Potter needed to die. This was part of some kind of plan, and breaking the hearts and spirits of the dozens of surviving soldiers in the Great Hall was the tragic side effect of it.
Draco picked up the limp body of a fallen Hufflepuff student and carried him back into the Great Hall. He placed the boy in line with the rest of the fallen and looked over to where Hermione was standing with the Weasleys.

She saw him and beckoned him over. He put one foot in front of the other, trying to find the words to say to her as he crossed the Great Hall. Luckily, she spoke first.

“He’s going to lose his leg,” she said. “But he’ll live.”

Draco nodded stiffly. “Good.” He looked past her to where Fred was lying. His crumpled leg was concealed beneath a thin sheet. He was awake now, but clearly under the influence of several potions. His head lolled to the side as he looked around at his family.

Fred’s blue eyes found Draco and lit up. “There he is!” he slurred, pointing a shaking finger at Draco. “M-malfoy! You saved my life!”

The entire Weasley family turned to him with wide eyes.

Draco felt his face heat up. “I really didn’t…”

“You did!” Percy agreed with his brother. “That wall might have crushed us all if you hadn’t warned us.”

Before Draco could respond, Molly Weasley hurried over and pulled him into a bone crushing hug. Every muscle in his body tensed. Few Weasleys had ever willingly touched him, and none had ever hugged him before. It felt...odd, but warm. “Thank you,” the Weasley matron whispered in his ear. She pulled away and wiped tears from her eyes. She smiled at him.

Draco looked down at his shoes. They were covered in dust and blood. He grimaced, but continued to stare at them to avoid looking at the Weasleys. “Don’t mention it,” he grumbled.

_I’m not a hero_, thought Draco, but he knew they were all looking at him like he was. Had they forgotten that he’d nearly killed Ron last year? That his father had nearly killed Ginny during her first year with that diary? Had they forgotten all the horrible things he’d said about them over the years?
And somewhere in the forest, Harry Potter was about to be murdered, if he hadn’t been already. *And I let him go.*

Chapter End Notes

Come on, y'all didn't think I would let Fred die, did you? I do apologize to those of you who wanted me to save Tonks and Snape. I can't save everyone!

So, this has been one of my favorite chapters. I really hope you all enjoyed it too. If you did, leave me a review and let me know what your favorite parts were!

Follow me on Tumblr for sneak peeks, updates on new and upcoming works, and to leave me lovely asks: HGinny25
Hermione held tight to Draco’s hand as all the Weasleys thanked him for saving Fred’s life. Despite the horror around them, she couldn’t help the contentment rising up within her. She had assumed, given Ron’s reaction when he first found out that she was seeing Draco, that the Weasleys would never accept him. She thought that her years of spending holidays at the Burrow and being considered part of the family were over. But now, she felt hopeful. Sure, they didn’t exactly like him, but being grateful was an excellent start. Assuming that they all survived the night, perhaps they would grow to accept him as they had her.

She turned to look for Harry and felt her contentment fade away as she took in the misery that permeated the Great Hall. While the Weasleys were celebrating their survival, other families were not so lucky. Lupin was still weeping over Tonk’s body. Colin Creevey must have snuck back into the castle to fight and was lying dead next to a Ravenclaw girl Hermione recognized from Herbology class last year. She pushed her sadness down into the place where she kept the despair of losing her baby. If she survived the war, she would finally grieve them all.

Harry was nowhere to be seen. She craned her neck to look around the dozens of Order members and seventh year student soldiers to look for her bespectacled friend.

“What is it?” asked Draco.

“Has anyone seen Harry?” she asked. All of the Weasleys merely shook their heads, but a flash of some emotion crossed Draco’s face that she couldn’t identify. His mouth opened and a strangled sound escaped his throat before he snapped it shut again.

“I...no, haven’t seen him,” Draco choked out, deftly turning his face away from hers.

He was being odd. Hermione knew him well enough by now to know when he was avoiding a
“HARRY POTTER IS DEAD!”

It was as if the floor had opened up beneath her, sending her into freefall as the cold voice made its announcement.

“No,” she breathed in horror and disbelief. Harry had to be here somewhere. All around her, people were looking at each other, hoping that it wasn’t true—hoping to see the scarred wizard still standing in their midst.

“*He was killed as he ran away, trying to save himself while you lay down your lives for him. We bring you his body as proof that your hero is gone.*”

Hermione tried to think logically, forcing her brain to work to overcome the panicked beating of her heart. This *must* be a lie. Harry would *never* have run away. Voldemort must have a spy here, someone telling him that Harry was not in the Great Hall. This was a trick to lure Harry out into the open. He would have to reveal himself to prove that he was not dead.

“The battle is won. You have lost half of your fighters. My Death Eaters outnumb*ber you, and the Boy-Who-Lived is finished. There must be no more war. Anyone who continues to resist, man, woman, or child, will be slaughtered, as will every member of their family. Come out of the castle now, kneel before me, and you shall be spared. Your parents and children, your brothers and sisters will live and be forgiven, and you will join me in the new world we shall build together.*”

Order Members, in their confusion and disbelief, were amassing toward the exit and making their way down the entrance hall stairs toward the courtyard. Hermione felt her feet follow them.

“Hermione, wait,” Draco said. His voice was shaking and when she turned to face him, his eyes were filled with terror.

“We have to follow them. This can’t be true. Harry’s probably just...hiding...or something.” Even as she said it, she felt her convictions waver. Harry wasn’t one to hide, and Voldemort’s speech of victory had sounded too sincere.

She tried to remember the last time she had seen Harry. He had arrived at the Great Hall with her and
Ron, but she had not seen him since then. How long ago had that been? Long enough for him to walk to the forest and turn himself in?

Her heart gripped itself like a vice. Harry couldn’t be dead. Harry…

“We need to go,” Draco whispered to her urgently. “You and me. We need to run. We can get out of the country before it’s too late.”

She backed away from him, but he held on to her hand tightly. “What if it isn’t true?” she asked.

The same look crossed his face, and it hit her. It was true, and somehow Draco knew it was true. “He said it was the way it needed to be.” He looked ashamed.

“You let him go…” Her voice broke.

“I tried to convince him not to.”

She squeezed her eyes shut against the tears that were blurring her vision.

“No!” came a distant scream. Hermione had never imagined that Professor McGonagall could make such a sound of anguish. The noise hit her like a punch in the stomach and her feet carried her swiftly to the door and down the steps to the courtyard before she could even make a conscious decision to move. She heard Draco’s hurried footsteps following her.

She burst through the crowd of stunned observers and saw Voldemort standing at the center of the courtyard, a hundred Death Eaters at his back. The snake was draped around his bony shoulders and he looked... victorious.

“NO!” cried Ron.

Hermione followed his gaze to see Hagrid standing, wrapped in ropes. He was carrying the limp form of her best friend.
“No!” she heard herself scream. Harry was dead. Her Harry. The first friend she ever made at Hogwarts. The boy who had stood by her through every trial of adolescence, through the news that she was in love with Draco, through her pregnancy, through her miscarriage. Harry…

Her knees gave way, but she did not hit the ground. She was being supported by strong arms around her. Draco.

Ginny was weeping. The crowd of survivors were yelling and screaming at the Death Eaters.

“SILENCE!” shouted Voldemort. Hermione felt her voice give out. Though she was still crying and screaming, no noise escaped her throat.

“It is over!” shouted Voldemort, his lips curled over his teeth in a vicious grin. “Set him down, Hagrid, at my feet, where he belongs!”

Hagrid, wailing openly, stepped forward and lowered Harry onto the grass.

“You see?” said Voldemort, pacing around Harry like a predator. “Harry Potter is dead! Do you understand now, deluded ones? He was nothing, ever, but a boy who relied on others to sacrifice themselves for him!”

From her left, Ron shouted, “He beat you!” the silencing spell was broken and suddenly all of Harry’s supporters were yelling again until Voldemort recast the charm with a flick of his wand, silencing the crowd once again.

“He was killed while trying to sneak out of the castle grounds,” said Voldemort with a sneer. “Killed while trying to save himself.”

Neville bolted forward, wand aloft. He fired a severing charm at Voldemort…or was it at the snake? Kill the snake. The spell missed, however, when Voldemort threw up a shield charm. In the next instant, Neville was disarmed and thrown backwards. He landed with a groan and Voldemort cast Neville’s wand aside with a chuckle.

“And who is this?” he hissed.
Bellatrix Lestrange cackled and Hermione’s blood ran cold. Draco’s arms were still around her, but she no longer needed him to support her. Adrenaline was pumping through her veins at the sight of the woman who had tortured her. She stared across the courtyard at the deranged witch. _Kill the snake_, she thought with conviction, _and then kill her._

Voldemort was speaking to Neville, trying to convince the young Gryffindor to join his ranks, but Hermione was only partially paying attention. She was mostly transfixed on Bellatrix, and comprehended only some of Voldemort’s words. Neville, for his part, never wavered in his loyalty to Harry. Voldemort was getting angry now, and Hermione braced herself for the loss of yet another friend. From the high turrets of the castle came a dark, lumpy object, summoned by Voldemort. He grabbed it from midair and unfurled it. The Sorting Hat. He was speaking loudly to the crowd now, about the end of sorting at Hogwarts. All students would be in Slytherin now. The snake was still coiled around his shoulders, it’s yellow eyes watching Neville.

Her fingers reached into her beaded bag and she fished out one of the basilisk fangs. She put it in her pocket where she could more easily retrieve it if she had an opportunity to go after the snake. This had always been a possibility. Harry knew all along that it might all end with his death. The least she could do for him now was make sure that Voldemort went down too. _Kill the snake. Kill Bellatrix. Kill Voldemort._

“Neville here, is going to show us what happens to those who defy Lord Voldemort.” Voldemort forced the Sorting Hat down on Neville’s head. He pulled his wand and Hermione’s heart stopped. But whatever spell Voldemort had been planning never came, for his red eyes had found a new target from across the courtyard.

“Ah!” Voldemort cried with glee. “Draco!”

Hermione’s heart pounded thunderously in her ears as everyone, Death Eater and Order alike, turned to look at Draco.

Draco, to his credit, did not flinch. His eyes were cold as he stared back at the Dark Lord.

“Draco,” came a softer voice. Narcissa Malfoy stood near her husband and sister in Voldemort’s ranks. Her eyes were teary as she called out for her only son.

Something flickered behind Draco’s eyes as he looked at his mother, a small crack in his icy veneer. Hermione gripped his arm tightly.
“Son,” said Lucius. His voice was hoarse, begging for his son to come and stand by his side as he once had.

“Draco,” hissed Voldemort. “Come and join us. All will be forgiven if you come and kneel before me.”

Draco looked like he was in physical pain. Hermione knew he was most likely thinking of the consequences of his actions with either choice. Voldemort would never accept her, so he could not go to his parents and save himself without losing her. And he could not defy Voldemort without putting himself and his parents in danger.

Draco did not weigh his options for long. He looked at Narcissa. “I’m sorry, Mother.”

Narcissa burst into tears, but if Draco’s words shocked Voldemort, he did not show it. He took a few steps away from his troops toward the survivors. “Think carefully, Draco. Lord Voldemort is merciful, but there are limits to my tolerance. Walk to me now and join us...or die.”

Narcissa was weeping now. “No, my lord,” she begged. “Please, show him mercy!” She moved to run towards Voldemort, but was restrained by Dolohov.

Voldemort did not address her, he merely kept his eyes trained on the young blond Slytherin. “What do you have to say, Draco?”

Draco cleared his throat and gave Voldemort a pleasant smile. Slowly, enunciating each word, he said, “Fuck. You.”

Voldemort blinked, but otherwise did not show surprise. Instead he regarded Draco like a rather odd piece of abstract art. “Very well.” His lips curled into a sneer. “Dolohov, bring Narcissa to me.”

Narcissa screamed as Dolohov began to drag her towards the snake-like wizard. “NO!” Draco shouted. He attempted to run forward, but Arthur and Bill Weasley held him back. There was an outcry of protests from the Hogwarts defenders as the blonde witch was pushed to her knees in front of Voldemort.

“Look at her, Draco,” Voldemort demanded over the din. “See the consequences of your actions.” He raised his wand and trained it on Narcissa. “Cru...”
In the next moment, many things happened at once. There was an uproar from the distant boundary of the school as hundreds of people swarmed toward the castle, wands raised high. Aurors, Hogsmeade shop owners and residents were all joining the fight. The earth quaked as Grawp stomped around the castle with a great yell, causing Voldemort’s giants to lumber forward to attack him. A thunderous roar of hooves almost drowned out the clash of giants as hundreds of centaurs galloped forward, firing arrows toward the crowd of Death Eaters.

As Voldemort and his followers were momentarily distracted, casting shield charms to protect themselves from the deathly sharp arrows, Neville stood up unnoticed. He ripped the Sorting Hat off his head, and from it, withdrew the gleaming Sword of Gryffindor. He swung hard and true, drawing every eye to him as the sword sliced through the snake in a single stroke. Nagini’s head spun high into the air before falling to the ground along with the rest of her body.

Voldemort’s mouth opened in a scream of fury and he slashed with his wand, determined to punish the one who killed his snake. The spell, however, did not touch Neville. Draco waved his wand quickly, producing a Shield Charm between Neville and Voldemort. It was almost instantly joined by a surprising second protection charm, both shimmering brightly, working together to form a doubly strong layer of defense against the Dark Lord. Instead of hitting the Gryffindor, Voldemort's purple hex ricocheted off the dual shields and back toward the Death Eaters.

“HARRY! WHERE’S HARRY?” Hagrid was yelling.

Hermione searched the ground wildly for Harry’s body. It was nowhere to be found. Had he been trampled? Dragged by Death Eaters away from the fray?

Everyone, Order and Death Eater alike, was being forced into the great castle by the stampede of magical creatures. Hermione grabbed hold of Draco’s hand and pulled him with her, desperate not to be separated from him. He was craning his neck over the throngs of people. “My mother! Where is she?” he called.

“I don’t know. We’ll find her,” she promised as they were pushed through the doors.

To her left, a Death Eater fell, stunned from an unknown source. Another crumpled to her right. She wheeled around in search of the person who had stunned them, but everyone she saw was just focused on not being trampled.

They were pushed into the Great Hall. Voldemort was at the center of the room firing off spells left
and right, shouting instructions to his followers. Shield Charms kept popping up between him and his
targets, much to his surprise and frustration. He looked like a cornered animal, wild and dangerous.
Curses flew from his wand with abandon, seeking targets they could not hit. His eyes were dark and
wide and his robes whipped around him as the air surrounding him crackled with magic. Hermione
looked around for the caster of the shield charms that were creating such an annoyance for
Voldemort, but saw no one.

Several centaurs galloped up the stairs and into the Great Hall with a clatter of hooves on stone.
Hogsmeade homeowners and shopkeepers followed quickly behind, finally joining the fight. High-
pitched battle cries caught Hermione’s attention. She turned to the entrance to see a swarm of house
elvës, led by Kreacher, running into the fray wielding kitchen knives and cleavers. They stabbed at
the legs of Death Eaters who were now being overtaken by sheer numbers.

Hermione watched as George and Lee Jordan hit Yaxley with a Jelly Legs Jinx. The Death Eater
flailed around the hall for a moment before he was stunned, and crumpled to the floor. With a
scream, Dolohov fell at Flitwick’s hands. McNair’s body flew across the room, thrown by Hagrid.
He hit the opposite wall and slid to the floor, unconscious. All around her, Order members were
taking down Voldemort's followers. Ron and Neville stunned Rookwood and Blaise did the same to
Thicknesse. Theo was dueling his father with a look that could only be described as pure
exhilaration.

Across the hall, Lucius and Narcissa were running through the crowd, dodging the light arcs from
cast curses and hexes, not even bothering to fight, screaming for Draco.

“Mother! Father!” Draco called across the deafening sounds of battle. Hermione could barely hear
him from where she stood next to him. Surely they could not hear him from across the room. She
turned to look for an opening for him to run to reunite with them. She pulled him further into the
room and began to skirt around the edge, stunning as many adversaries as she could. She darted past
a small group of seventh year Ravenclaw students all dueling with a pair of large Death Eaters and
nearly ran directly into Bellatrix Lestrange.

“You got away from me once, Mudblood,” the deranged witch snickered, raising her new wand, her
eyes dancing with gleeful malice. “It won’t happen again.”

Hermione fired a stunning spell at the witch, which was blocked easily. Draco also began to fire
spells at his insane aunt, but Bellatrix was a gifted dueler, and even working together, they could not
get the best of her.

She moved with an ease that could only come with a deep joy of killing and years of practice. More
years than Hermione and Draco had combined. Hermione fired spell after spell at the witch, growing
less concerned with which spells they were. She wanted to inflict as much damage on the woman as
she could. She had never attempted a killing curse before, but Draco was shouting the words over and over again at his aunt, missing or being blocked every time.

“What will you do, Draco, after I kill your little Mudblood girlfriend?”

Draco sneered and shouted another killing curse at her, which she blocked with a laugh. “You’ll have to do better than that, nephew!”

Hermione fired a Cruciatius Curse at the woman and it hit her in the stomach. Bellatrix fell to her knees, a high pitched scream filling the air around them. Draco was staring at Hermione, his eyes wide with surprise, but she didn’t care. Bellatrix was at her mercy now. The witch’s screams of pain were like a salve to Hermione’s emotional wounds. All she wanted was to inflict as much pain on the woman as she could. She wouldn’t be satisfied until Bellatrix matched her scream for scream, curse for curse, life for life.

Someone brushed past her, jostling her roughly and severing the curse’s connection to Bellatrix. Before Hermione could repeat the curse, her wand was flying away from her hand. In a flash, Bellatrix had disarmed her. In the next instant, she flicked her wand at her nephew, and Draco was sent soaring across the room with a shout. Hermione stepped back in surprise and found herself up against a wall.

Bellatrix threw a shield charm around them and was upon her in an instant, her wand at the Gryffindor’s chin and the bony fingers of her left hand wrapping tightly around her neck. Hermione was lifted off the ground, her toes barely brushing the floor. “You have a lot of fight, I’ll give you that.”

Hermione’s feet scrambled on the wall in an effort to relieve the pressure on her windpipe. Her hands gripped Bellatrix’s arms and she thrashed trying to get away. She couldn’t breathe. Ginny, Luna, and Ron were all firing spells at Bellatrix, but none could penetrate the strong shield charm. From behind the witch, Hermione could see Draco barrelling toward them through the sea of dueling witches and wizards. But Hermione was already choking and gasping for air, her face mottling. She released Bellatrix’s arms and her hands desperately clawed at the wall, seeking help from any source.

“You’re going to die now, Mudblood. Slowly, and painfully, while all your little friends watch.”

Hermione’s hand delved into her pocket, closing around the fang she had reserved for Nagini. Seeing spots now as her oxygen levels were drastically low, she withdrew it and thrust forward blindly.
She felt resistance as it collided with Bellatrix’s stomach, but she pushed it forward with all her remaining strength and it finally sank into the witch’s skin.

Hermione fell to the floor as Bellatrix released her, stumbling back with wide eyes. She grasped at her stomach, pulling the fang from between her ribs and looking at Hermione in shock. She staggered a few more steps before falling to her knees, her wand clattering to the floor.

As Bellatrix’s shield charm finally flickered and faded away, Draco rushed forward to help Hermione, but she waved him off. Gasping for air, but desperate to finish the job, Hermione crawled forward. Her fingers closed around the now bloody basilisk fang and she climbed to her feet before the bleeding witch.

Bellatrix looked up at her, shock and confusion etched on her face. She fell back onto the floor, her blood flowing from the wound in her stomach and pooling on the floor beneath her. Hermione sank to her knees next to the dying witch. Bellatrix just stared in horror, as if she couldn’t understand how and why this was happening. Hermione leaned in close, positioning the fang over Bellatrix’s heart. “Go to hell, you bitch,” she spat savagely before driving the fang in with all her might.

Bellatrix coughed, blood spluttering from her mouth. Her eyes went wide for a moment before she took a shuddering breath, choking on her own blood, until at last she was still and quiet. Dead.

It was several seconds before the reality of what had just happened sank in for Hermione. She fell back off her knees with a gasp, her eyes still fixed on the dead witch before her. She rubbed her sore neck, feeling the tender skin.

Then Draco was there, his hands on her face, his fingers examining her neck and wiping away blood from her cheek that must have been Bellatrix’s. “You’re alright,” he murmured. “You’re alright.”

Other people were moving in now, helping her to her feet, clapping her on the back. Someone put a wand in her hand, but she couldn’t imagine what she could possibly need it for now. Bellatrix was dead; she had nothing left to accomplish.

~*~*~

Draco looked at his fallen aunt. He could scarcely believe it. She was dead. The tight coil of hatred and fear he held in his stomach loosened slightly. He turned to Hermione. Tears were rolling down
her cheeks as she observed the witch she had killed, but she looked relieved.

“Harry!” came a sudden cry. Hermione’s head snapped up.

“HE’S ALIVE!” Someone else shouted. Shouts of surprise and elation erupted from all around. Everyone was facing the center of the room now and an eerie hush fell over the crowd. Hermione climbed on top of a table to get a better view. Draco followed to stand next to her, his mouth falling open in shock. Sure enough, the Boy-Who-Lived, lived again.

“I don’t want anyone to try to help,” Harry said loudly. “It’s got to be me.”

Voldemort sneered, surprise and fear behind his eyes. “Potter doesn’t mean that,” he said. “Who are you going to use as a shield today, Potter?”

“Nobody,” said Harry with ease. “There are no more Horcruxes. It’s just you and me.”

Draco watched as Potter, miraculously resurrected, stood before the Dark Lord. Never had he felt so simultaneously fearful and hopeful. The two wizards circled each other. Voldemort was taunting Harry, but behind his hateful eyes there was something else: confusion, and, perhaps, fear.

Harry was alive. How could this be? He had been dead mere moments ago, hadn’t he?

“You think I should be afraid of you, boy? I hold the Elder Wand! You have no one left to protect you. Albus Dumbledore is dead, and I brought about his demise!” Voldemort shouted at Potter.

“You thought you did,” said Harry, “but you were wrong.”

Draco shook his head, sure that he had heard that incorrectly. Dumbledore was dead because he had let the Death Eaters into the castle. A mission given to him by Lord Voldemort, enacted by Draco, and executed by Snape. How could Potter say that it was not Voldemort’s doing?

“Yes, Dumbledore’s dead,” Harry said evenly. “But you didn’t have him killed. He chose his own manner of death months before the actual event. He arranged the whole thing with the man you thought was your servant.”
Snape? Draco didn’t know what the bloody hell Harry was talking about. Snape was a Death Eater. Was Potter claiming that Snape, the man who killed Albus Dumbledore, was not loyal to the Dark Lord?

“Severus Snape wasn’t yours,” Harry continued. “He was Dumbledore’s from the moment you started hunting my mother. He loved her for nearly all of his life. You should have realized when he asked you to spare her life. He’s been working against you ever since. Dumbledore was already dying when Snape finished him.”

Voldemort scoffed derisively. “It doesn’t matter!” he shrieked. “Dumbledore was trying to keep the Elder Wand from me! He intended for Snape to be the true master of the wand. But you see, I reached the wand before you could get your hands on it. I killed Snape hours ago, and the Elder wand is truly mine! Dumbledore’s plan went wrong, Harry Potter!” His eyes were deranged with rage.

Harry just smiled, gripping Draco’s old wand tightly in his hand. And suddenly, Draco felt an odd sense of purpose. The thing that had made him feel sick to his stomach days ago, now seemed a bit like... destiny.

*His wand.*

“You murdered the wrong person. Snape was never the true master of the Elder Wand. He never defeated Dumbledore,” Harry said.

“He killed Dumbledore!” Voldemort snapped.

“You aren’t listening! Possessing the wand isn’t enough! Holding it and using it doesn’t make it yours. *The wand chooses the wizard.* The Elder Wand recognized a new master before Dumbledore died, someone who has never even laid a hand on it. The new master removed the wand from Dumbledore against his will, never realizing exactly what he had done, or that the world’s most dangerous wand had given him allegiance…”

Voldemort looked close to the verge of cursing Harry now. The Elder Wand was vibrating in his pale hand, but Harry spoke calmly.

“The true master of the Elder Wand was Draco Malfoy.”
Hermione gasped next to him. He could feel several sets of eyes on him, but Draco’s eyes were on the Elder Wand. It had been his all along, and he’d never known it.

“No matter,” Voldemort said softly. “After I have killed you, I can attend to Draco Malfoy…”

“You’re too late,” said Harry. “I got there first. I disarmed Draco weeks ago. I took his wand from him.”

Had Draco been destined for this all along? He had always felt so unimportant, a small pawn in the greater story. But perhaps his role, while a supporting one, had been crucial. His lowest, most shameful moment had in some miraculous way led Potter here, to be the master of the Elder Wand, capable of destroying the Dark Lord at last.

“So,” whispered Harry. “Does the wand in your hand know that its last master was Disarmed? Because if it does…I am the true master of the Elder Wand.”

The sun rose at that moment, casting a red glow over the Great Hall. Voldemort and Harry shouted simultaneously and their spells met like a cannon blast halfway between them. With a blinding flash of green and red, Voldemort’s spell rebounded off of Harry’s and the Elder Wand flew into the air, spinning until it was caught by the Boy-Who-Lived as Voldemort fell backward, his eyes rolling back and his limbs going limp. The Dark Lord was dead, and Harry stood with two wands in his hand, staring down at his lifeless enemy.

There was one second of silence as everyone stared, incredulous at the dead wizard, and then the air erupted into a roar of cheers and shouts of jubilation. Hermione pulled Draco’s hand, but he stayed rooted to the spot. She turned around beaming at him, her eyes questioning. From across the room Draco could see his parents standing vulnerably as Harry’s surviving supporters celebrated around them. Draco smiled at Hermione and gave a little nod in Harry’s direction. She tore away from him, leaping from the table and pushing past people as she bounded to her friend and threw her arms around Harry’s neck. Ron was right next to her as they celebrated with their friend. The crowd around Harry grew so large that Draco could no longer see the Golden Trio; screaming, crying, cheering people all eager to lay hands upon their savior, the Boy Who Lived.

Chapter End Notes

The battle is won! Let me know what you think! I love getting reviews here, and I love getting asks on Tumblr. Follow me there (HGinny25) and send me all your love, questions, and thoughts about my story, me, or life in general. I'll love them all!
Peace

Chapter Notes

I am so sorry for the wait. It took me such a long time to finish it because I so badly wanted to end it well, and I think maybe I just didn't want it to end at all.

As always, HUGE thanks go out to my amazing betas: Disenchantedglow and inandoutlikethesea. You are both wonderful and your support of this story has helped me more than words can ever say.

To each and every person who has read, left kudos, commented, and subscribed: Thank you so much. I am so overwhelmed by the love and support this story received. When Resistance popped into my head 9 years ago I never imagined it would turn into this, and when it did, I never imagined that it would be so well received. It has truly been my baby and I am so overcome by every emotion possible now that it is completed! I am eternally grateful to all of you!

This is the end, folks. I hope I do it justice.

Draco stared at the blonde couple for several seconds before his feet carried him around the mass of celebrating witches and wizards to stand before his parents. There were tears in his mother’s eyes as he stopped before her. His father looked somewhat torn, and Draco felt his stomach clench painfully at the prospect of being rejected by them. “Hello, Mother… Father,” he greeted hesitantly.

In a flash, his mother stepped forward and threw her arms around her son’s neck. Draco was surprised by his mother’s public display of affection, but returned the hug, his heart soaring. He buried his face in the crook of her neck, feeling hopelessly childish but not caring in the slightest. Tears pricked at his eyes and he did his best to push them back.

He felt a hand on his shoulder and lifted his head to see his father gazing at him with a tight smile. His mother broke the hug and rested both of her hands on his cheeks. “Are you hurt?” she asked, her eyes dancing over his face.

Draco shook his head. “No, I’m…” his voice broke. “I’m fine.” The tears were threatening to fall again and he looked down, unable to bear their scrutinizing eyes. What could he say to them? He had turned his back on everything they had raised him to believe. He had abandoned them to the wrath of the Dark Lord when he ran away. He had denied them at the Manor and in the courtyard. He wanted to explain everything to them, but the words wouldn’t come. He opened his mouth in the hopes of telling them what had happened to him last June, but instead all he said was, “I’m so sorry.”
“Oh, darling,” his mother sighed, pulling him into her arms again. “You’re alive. We all are. That’s what’s important.”

His father, though he retained his gentle grip on Draco’s shoulder, still seemed to be fraught with conflict.

“Father,” Draco began, afraid to ask the question, but needing to know the answer. “At the Manor you said…” He couldn’t bear to ask. His throat tightened.

Lucius frowned, something akin to guilt crossing his face.

“I don’t expect you to agree with my choices, but I am your son. I’m the only child you have. I hope… well, I hope, with time, that we can come to understand one another again.” Draco’s heart was pounding. He could live his entire life without ever going back to the Manor and be perfectly happy, but he was still a Malfoy, the last of the line, and there were a lot of expectations that came with being the heir of one of the richest families in Wizarding Britain. Expectations that he had been groomed to meet, and now, ones that he hoped to use to help change wizarding society for the better.

Lucius dropped his arm to his side. “You are my son,” he said definitively. “As such, you are expected to act according to the standard of a Malfoy. From this moment forward, I expect you to remember that.”

Draco’s heart sank. It was clear that his father would not accept Hermione as Draco’s chosen partner. His eyes flickered over to her. She was standing with Potter and Weasley, smiling broadly and holding on to each of their hands. Her eyes found his and she beamed at him. He did his best to return her smile, but his heart was in a vice.

“Are you serious about her?” his mother asked gently. Draco tore his eyes away from the grinning brunette to look at his mother. She was looking at Hermione with curiosity and fear.

“Very,” Draco said firmly.

“She’s a mud...muggle-born?” Narcissa asked.

“She is.”
Narcissa chewed the inside of her cheek for a moment. “Not yet, but perhaps in a few weeks, I would like to meet her formally. We could have her over for tea,” she suggested.

“Narcissa,” Lucius hissed. “He cannot continue to fraternize with her. Draco, I will not allow you to besmirch the proud Malfoy name. We have remained pure for a thousand years. You cannot…”

“Father,” Draco interrupted. “Do not ask me to choose between her and my duties as the Malfoy heir. You will not like my answer.”

Lucius’s mouth gaped open for a moment before snapping shut. With a scowl, he turned away from his wife and son and moved to sit alone at one of the far tables.

“So dramatic,” Narcissa tutted, rolling her eyes. “He’ll come around.”

“Are you certain you approve of this?” Draco asked skeptically.

Narcissa tilted her head to the side, her blue eyes darting over to Hermione once more. “Not really, but if the choice is accepting it or losing you, I’ll get used to it. I thought I lost you last year,” she said, placing a gentle hand against his cheek. “I never want to lose you again.”

Draco wrapped his arms around his mother again. He had never been so grateful for her compassion. She could be a cold woman, yes, but she loved him fiercely. After a moment he pulled away, once again trying to suppress his threatening tears.

“I’m going to go talk some sense into your father,” Narcissa said. “Will you find us later?”

“Of course,” Draco promised.

With a final gentle smile to her son, Narcissa walked across the hall to stand intimidatingly before her husband. Draco grinned. His mother had always been the only one who could come close to controlling his father. Perhaps falling for strong-willed women was a genetic trait of the Malfoy men.
A sudden clap on his shoulder made him jump.

“Sorry, mate,” said Blaise with a grin.

Draco smiled at Blaise and Theo. “I can’t thank you both enough for what you did tonight,” he said.

“You’re such a sap,” Blaise teased.

“It was worth it to see my father’s face right before I petrified him. I’ll remember it forever,” Theo said, closing his eyes to replay the moment over again in his mind.

“You’re sick, Theo,” Blaise chuckled.

“The bastard made my life miserable for seventeen years. He deserves to sit in a cell, miserable, for a few years of his own.”

Draco glanced at Hermione. She was surrounded by Weasleys once again, but he found that the sight didn’t irritate him as much as it once had.

“Uh oh,” chuckled Theo. “Do I hear wedding bells?”

Draco turned back to his friends to see them both smirking wickedly at him. “What? No!” he protested, but something sparked within him. Some hope for a future he never imagined he would be lucky enough to get. “Well, not yet at least.”

“You’ve got it bad, mate. How the hell did that happen?” Blaise shook his head.

Draco shrugged. “It’s a long story.”

“And you don’t care that she’s a mudblood?” Blaise asked.
“Watch it,” Draco growled menacingly.

Blaise raised his hands defensively. “Alright, I’m sorry. But you’ve called her that more than anyone!”

“I know that.” Draco turned back to Hermione. Someone had just made her laugh. She tossed her head back and closed her eyes, the lovely peals of her laughter dancing around the Great Hall. “But I intend to spend the rest of my life making up for that.”

Theo dramatically pretended to gag. “Let me know when Draco Malfoy gets back, will you? His friends miss him.”


He glanced back at his parents. Kingsley Shacklebolt and an Auror were talking to them. His stomach dropped. Would they be arrested for their actions during the war? He could cope with his father’s imprisonment, but his mother...well, he could only hope she wouldn’t have to endure Azkaban. “I’ll catch up with you two later,” Draco intoned to Blaise and Theo. The two Slytherins looked surprised at their sudden dismissal, but upon seeing Draco’s parents they nodded their understanding. Blaise clapped Draco on the back as the blond walked across the hall towards his parents.

Another Auror blocked his path. “Please give the Minister a moment with Mr. and Mrs. Malfoy,” he said sternly.

“Minister?” Draco queried, raising an eyebrow.

“Kingsley Shacklebolt has just been named interim Minister of Magic.”

“Are my parents being arrested?” Draco asked the Auror. At that moment, Kingsley began walking over to him.

“No, not yet. We are taking them to a detention center at the Ministry for questioning, but they will not go to Azkaban unless they are convicted at their trials,” said Kingsley. His robes were torn and dusty. He had a smudge of blood on his right shoulder. He did not look like a politician at all, but maybe that was for the best.
“When will they be tried?” asked Draco. His parents were still sitting just out of earshot. They were holding hands and looking very solemn, but they did not look afraid.

“We can’t be sure yet,” said Kingsley. “You will be notified.” The newly appointed minister looked at the Auror next to him and nodded. The man took a few steps away from the two wizards. Kingsley frowned at Draco. “First, I would like to thank you for your actions over the last few months. From what I’ve heard from Mr. Potter, you were a valuable asset for him and the Order. I hope that you know how appreciative we all are. That being said, would you mind answering a few questions for me about the events of last June?”

Draco’s stomach plummeted. “Of course,” he said, feeling ill. He was going to go to prison. After everything he had done this year, it still wasn’t enough to absolve him of his sins.

“It is my understanding that Severus Snape killed Albus Dumbledore, is that correct?”

Draco nodded.

“And the Death Eaters accessed the castle through a Vanishing Cabinet that you worked to mend.”

“Yes, sir,” Draco said honestly. This was it. He was going to be arrested for his actions last year. It didn’t matter that he’d switched sides and fought for Potter. In the eyes of the Ministry, he would always be a villain. A marked man. A Death Eater.

Kingsley nodded with a frown. “I would like to see you at the Ministry this Thursday for formal questioning.”

“Yes, sir,” Draco said again. Was his voice shaking as badly as his nerves?

“You were underage when the events took place, so I cannot see you being prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.” The Minister placed a reassuring hand on Draco’s shoulder.

“Am I being taken to the Ministry with my parents?” Draco asked.
Kingsley shook his head, his eyes empathetic. “I see no reason for that. As far as I’m concerned, you have more than proven yourself to be an upstanding individual whose past actions were coerced, but I have to follow protocol. I cannot show favoritism. You are not under arrest, but please do not leave the country.”

“Yes, sir. See you Thursday.”

With a cordial handshake, Kingsley walked away from Draco toward a stunned and bound Death Eater who was beginning to regain consciousness.

With a heavy heart, Draco turned back to look at his parents. They were surrendering their wands to a tall Auror.

From the corner of his eye, he saw Hermione standing next to the body of Bellatrix Lestrange again. He approached her cautiously, unsure of how to tell her that he might be imprisoned.

She was crying softly. “I murdered her,” she breathed when he came to stand next to her.

“She would have killed you if you hadn’t killed her,” Draco said.

“I know that. I’m not sorry that she’s dead, I just...I stabbed her. I didn’t have to do that,” she sniffled.

“You didn’t have your wand,” Draco reminded her.

“Well, I didn’t have to stab her twice.”

Draco didn’t know what to say to her to absolve her of her guilt. She had taken a life, but it certainly wasn’t an innocent life. He could think of no one who had deserved it more than Bellatrix had. Still, Bellatrix had been alive at the beginning of the battle, and now she was dead because of Hermione.

“I killed Greyback,” Draco confessed.
Hermione gazed up at him, her chocolate eyes wide in shock.

“He was threatening you,” Draco explained. “I didn’t even plan it, I just…” he trailed off. Perhaps he should feel guilty for killing the werewolf, but he didn’t. The man was a monster. The world was a better place without him in it.

“How did you..?” Hermione asked hesitantly, grabbing hold of his hand.

“Killing curse. First time I ever used it.”

Hermione turned away from Bellatrix’s body to look up at Draco. “Well, I guess we’re both murderers,” she said darkly.

Draco’s mind reeled at the thought. Murderers. He didn’t think of himself as a murderer. And looking at Hermione, it was impossible to think of her that way too. “Self defense isn’t murder, Hermione,” he said sternly.

She hummed somewhat dismissively and turned her back on the pale, dead witch. She pulled his hand and he followed her away from the dead to where the survivors were gathering.

Perhaps she just didn’t want to discuss it right now. Perhaps, after everything that had happened to her over the past few months, she just wanted to live in the bliss of victory for a few moments longer.

Draco and Hermione approached the Weasleys hand in hand. Fred was lying on a cot, and his left leg was gone below the knee. So why did he look so cheerful? Everyone else was looking at him solemnly.

“This is terrible!” Fred moaned dramatically. “I can’t stand to be without my leg!”

George grinned. Molly, who seemed not to have gotten the joke, wiped away a fresh wave of tears.

“Oh come on,” said Fred. “It’s going tibia okay!”
Ginny rolled her eyes and groaned. “Madam Pomfrey gave you some pain killers, huh?” she asked with a smirk.

Fred nodded languidly. “Some really great ones!”

“Fred…” Molly chastised.

Fred reached out and grabbed his mother’s hand. “Lighten up, mum! I can always work at the Leaky Cauldron...as a bellhop!” George burst out laughing.

“You’re a real leg -acy!” George joked.

Half of the Weasleys had descended into giggles now. Even Molly was doing her best to suppress a smile. “That’s not funny,” she insisted.

“Oh mum, I for one find this pretty humerus,” Fred said with a grin.

“That’s in your arm,” said Percy.

“You’re right. I guess I don’t have a leg to stand on!”

“That was terrible,” chuckled Ginny.

“Is this what you’re going to be like now? Awful puns and jokes forever?” asked Bill.

“Definitely,” grinned George. “At least everyone will be able to tell us apart now.”

“They could already do that since you lost your bloody ear, George!” said Ron.

“Yes, and he made some real shit jokes about it too,” added Fred.
George scoffed. “As if your leg jokes are any better!”

Fred sat up in mock indignation. “I don’t have to stand for this!”

Everyone laughed, and for a moment all of Draco’s troubles seemed far away.

“Psst, Hermione,” a voice hissed from behind them.

Draco and Hermione turned, but no one was there.

“It’s me.”

Harry. Under his cloak.

“Get Ron and follow me,” Harry requested.

Hermione glanced at Draco. “You go on,” he urged.

“Come find me in a few?” she pleaded. He nodded and she squeezed his hand appreciatively.

She moved away from him and placed her hand on Ron’s shoulder. The boy followed her away from his family and out of the Great Hall to where Draco knew an invisible Boy-Who-Lived was waiting for his two best friends.

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Draco approached Hermione as Potter and Weasley walked back toward the castle. She stared out over the lake, looking equally content and forlorn. She smiled weakly at him as he settled next to her. She interlaced her fingers with his and rested her head on his shoulder.

Draco could scarcely believe it. Voldemort was dead. Bellatrix was dead. The Death Eaters had
either gone into hiding or been arrested. Most importantly, he and Hermione had both survived. For
the first time in several years, perhaps the first time in his life, he felt free. Thoughts of the future
weren’t clipped short in his mind.

“Hey,” he murmured, turning his head to press a kiss into her hair.

“Hey,” she parroted back to him.

“My mom wants to meet you,” he said.

She pulled away and looked up at him, her eyes fearful. She looked past Draco and toward the castle
as if expecting to see the Malfoy matriarch hovering nearby with an unapproving glare. “She does?”
she asked hesitantly.

“Not yet. But she mentioned having you over for tea in a month or so.”

Draco thought this news would put Hermione at ease, but if anything, she appeared more panicked.
“I...I can’t go back to the Manor,” she breathed.

Heart sinking, Draco nodded. Of course she didn’t want to go back there. Truth be told, he didn’t
want to go back either. It was his birthright, yes, but he would sooner see it burn to the ground than
ever live in that house again. “We could meet in Diagon Alley. You never need to go back there.
She’ll understand,” he promised.

She smiled, buried her face in his chest, and wrapped her arms tightly around him.

They stood quietly for several moments. Draco looked out over the lake. It was so quiet that he could
almost imagine that they were on the run again. As if he could turn around and see their tent waiting
for them up the hill. Just the two of them in their cozy tent in the woods. What would they do now?
What couldn’t they do now?

“Now what?” he asked with a sigh.

Hermione chuckled. “Well, I’ve been thinking about that actually. I think I’ll go to Australia. Try to
find my parents, restore their memories if I can, and bring them home.”
“I think that’s an excellent idea,” Draco said. His heart was sinking like a stone. He could not go with her. Kingsley had told him not to leave the country. The thought of being parted from Hermione was almost as frightening as the prospect of spending years in Azkaban.

“And then I want to come back and finish my schooling properly,” she added.

“You know you could probably get any job you wanted even without your N.E.W.T.s right? You’re a war heroine now!”

Hermione shrugged. “I want to finish. I’m not interested in any job that I haven’t truly earned.”

“Why doesn’t that surprise me?” Draco droned, rolling his eyes.

“Will you come back too?” she asked hopefully.

Draco thought for a moment. He had hoped to never return to Hogwarts when they had run away last year. Yet here they stood; and while he didn’t exactly relish the idea of sitting through Charms classes next year, he knew he would follow this witch anywhere. “If you’re coming back, I will too,” he promised, pressing another kiss into her hair. *If I’m not in prison, that is.*

“I love you, you know.” It was barely a whisper, but he knew she had heard him.

She smiled and looked up at him. “I know. I love you too.” She stood on her tiptoes to kiss him.

He cupped her face in his hands, and her bright eyes danced between his own. For the first time since they’d run away together, he thought about the possibility of a future. A future with her. Looking into her eyes, he swore he could see the next sixty years of his life.

He had so much to say, and he was afraid he would lose his nerve if he didn’t say it now, when his relief of being alive was far outweighing his fear of baring his soul to her. “I know things won’t be easy for us just because the war is over, and I know we’ve been through a lot. I just want you to know that I don’t give a shit about what people are going to say about us, or what they think.”

Hermione beamed at him. “Neither do I.”

He pulled her into his chest and wrapped his arms around her. There was one more thing that had been thudding persistently in his heart for two months. Since the miscarriage. It hadn’t seemed like the time to say it when the wounds were still so fresh, but now, in the dawn of the future they were
about to build together, he couldn’t keep it in. “And I want a life with you... a family with you. One day, when the time is right, I want a whole mess of curly-haired rugrats.”

Hermione grinned at him. “Even though they would be half-blood?” she asked.

Draco shook his head. “I don’t care about their blood status, as long as they’re yours.”

Hermione’s eyes were swimming with tears, but she was smiling at him adoringly. “Maybe we should go out on a proper date first?” she suggested cheekily.

Draco grinned. “After nearly a year of living together and several months in a relationship? Yeah, that’s a good idea, actually. What, oh, what should we do for our first date?” He looked around dramatically as if seeking inspiration for romantic date ideas. She was smirking at him wickedly. “What?” he chuckled.

“You said relationship,” she pointed out.

Draco rolled his eyes. “Seriously? That’s what you’re going to fixate on?”

“What? You never talk about our relationship.”

“I’ve told you that I love you and would one day like to have babies with you. I think it’s safe to say that you’re my girlfriend, Granger.”

Hermione beamed, “Alright, boyfriend, I’ll drop it. Come on, let’s get back to the others.”

Draco grumbled and Hermione laughed at him, looping her arm through his and walking next to him back to the castle. “Don’t worry,” she said with a grin. “You’ll have me all to yourself again soon.”

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After the battle, Draco and Hermione, along with Harry and several other young Order members who had nowhere else to go, settled at Grimmauld Place. They were planning to stay there for the summer until they returned to school. It had been less than a week, but Harry was already renovating the house and preparing to begin the Auror training program with Ron.

That week had been a whirlwind of dinners at the Burrow, repair work at Hogwarts, and interviews with The Daily Prophet. Draco was exhausted and desperately wished to return to some sort of normality, something he had not had in over a year now. But with his interrogation at the Ministry looming, and Hermione’s trip to Australia fast approaching, normality was unlikely to be achieved any time soon. Then again, Draco wasn’t even sure what normality looked like anymore.

The sun had shone every day since the end of the war, but Thursday morning arrived with rain, reminding them of their return to reality.
Draco awoke in Hermione’s embrace for what would likely be the last time for several weeks. Her portkey would be departing at ten o’clock for Australia. He figured it would surely take her at least a few days to find her parents. After that, it would take her a great deal of time and skilled spell work to restore their memories.

She had been in contact with a healer in Australia who specialized in memory restoration after spell damage. He agreed to meet with her once her parents had been located to help her reverse the memory charm.

Draco wouldn’t be going with her. His meeting with Kingsley was scheduled for half past ten. He hadn’t told Hermione. He knew she would have stayed if he had told her. Her task was more important. He didn’t want anything to stand in the way of her finding her parents.

So at quarter to ten, he stood by the fireplace at Grimmauld place to see Hermione off. She would Floo to the portkey office before her appointment and then leave for Australia from there.

“Are you sure you don’t want to come with me?” She offered, hoisting her beaded bag a bit higher on her shoulder.

Draco reached up and tucked a wayward curl behind her ear. “I’m sure. Your parents are going to want to spend all of their time with you once you find them. They don’t need your ne’er do well boyfriend hanging around while you’re just getting reacquainted.”

Hermione smiled, but there were tears in her eyes. “I’ll miss you,” she offered, wrapping her arms around him and burying her face in his chest.

“I’ll miss you too,” he said, his chest clenching painfully. Would he be imprisoned by the time she returned? “You’d better go. Write when you get there. Update me as much as you can.”

“You write me too. Promise me. Harry and Ron always said they’d write, but they never…”

“I promise I’ll write,” Draco chuckled. “You’ve made it easy with your clever little Protean charm. I’ll take my notebook everywhere.”
Inspired by her Dumbledore’s Army galleons from fifth year, Hermione had charmed two small notebooks with a similar spell. The distance between England and Australia made owl post nearly impossible, and obviously not contacting each other at all was out of the question. The notebooks were small enough to fit in their pockets so that they could be taken anywhere.

Hermione smiled. “Make sure you do. I’ll see you before the summer is over,” she promised.

Draco nodded and kissed the top of her head gently. “I love you,” he mumbled.

Hermione pulled away to wipe her eyes with a watery smile. “I love you, too.” She kissed him tenderly, lingering a little longer than usual before pulling away. “Be good,” she said with a grin. “Don’t kill Harry while I’m gone.”

Draco chuckled. “I’ll do my best not to. Good luck with your parents.”

With one final smile at him, Hermione disappeared into the Floo in a burst of green flames.

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Draco’s meeting with Kingsley lasted until noon. He had been surprised to meet with the Minister himself, but Kingsley had explained that there was still a great deal of confusion within the ranking Ministry officials, and the best way to proceed with these criminal cases was for him to handle them himself. Draco was interrogated about his involvement with Voldemort, the events of the night that Dumbledore was murdered, and everything that had happened since then. Draco spared no detail that he thought might be helpful to his case. His attorney, Mr. Bradshaw sat next to him. Bradshaw had advised him not to answer Kingsley’s questions, but Draco had chosen not to take his advice. He didn’t want to hide anything. If the Wizengamot believed that he should face trial for what he had done, so be it.

Listing everything that had happened over the past year or so was oddly cathartic. After everything he had done in his sixth year, it was sometimes hard for him to think of himself as anything but a villain. But going over everything that had happened since he ran away with Hermione, the Horcrux hunt, Godric’s Hollow, the Manor, Gringotts, the Battle, he felt lighter. Perhaps he had broken laws, but he felt...proud. Proud of the man he’d become despite all the odds.

“Very well, Mr. Malfoy. We have your testimony on file. We have a few character witness interviews to conduct. After that, your case will go to a small committee that will deliberate and
determine if criminal charges are to be filed. Your will receive the results tomorrow afternoon,” said Kingsley.

“That soon?” Draco asked in surprise.

Kingsley nodded. He did not smile, but his eyes were kind. “It should be very quick.”

“And if charges are filed?” asked Draco.

“If the committee decides that they would like to press charges against you, a formal trial would be the next step. I wouldn’t worry about that yet though.” Kingsley rose from his seat and gathered the notes from the meeting into a file folder. “Thank you for coming in and for being so forthright with your testimony.”

“Of course,” said Draco, shaking Kingsley’s free hand.

Mr. Bradshaw closed his briefcase and rose from his chair. “Minister,” he said stiffly, shaking Kingsley’s hand.

Kingsley gave the two wizards a cordial nod before escorting them to the door. Draco stepped out into the hallway and nearly ran headlong into a very angry bushy-haired witch.

“Excuse me, miss,” grumbled Bradshaw as he brushed past her to walk down the corridor.

“Hermione,” Draco gasped. “What are you doing here?”

Her eyes were dark as she answered him. “Well, I was at the Portkey Offices when Harry stopped by to see me off. Imagine my surprise when he said he was getting ready to come speak on your behalf at your questioning, especially considering that I had no idea said questioning was even taking place.”

Draco glanced behind Hermione to see Harry sheepishly looking at his own shoes. “I didn’t know you hadn’t told her,” Harry said defensively with a shrug.
“Hermione, I…” Draco began.

Hermione cut him off with a glare. “No, you don’t get to talk to me right now. You were just going to let me leave for Australia while you were possibly facing trial? You were going to let me leave knowing that you might be in prison when I returned?”

“I…”

“Shut up,” she snapped. “Did you ever think that I might be able to help you? That my testimony might be what makes the difference between your imprisonment and your exoneration? We’re in a relationship, Draco. That means that I stand by you through good times and bad. That includes this.”

“What about your parents?” he asked.

“I rescheduled my portkey for next week. My parents don’t even know I exist. They won’t know the difference. Now, if you don’t mind, I’m going to go in there and save your stubborn ass.” With one final withering glare, she marched past him and into the interrogation room, closing the door with a snap behind her.

Draco couldn’t help but smile at his girlfriend’s ferociousness.

“Sorry, mate,” said Harry. “I thought she knew. In the future, if we’re pulling a ruse, just let me know, yeah?”

Draco chuckled. “I don’t think I’m ever going to keep anything from her again.”

“That’s smart. I wouldn’t want to be on the receiving end of too many of Hermione’s lectures. I had enough of that at Hogwarts.”

“Listen, thanks for giving your testimony,” Draco said appreciatively.

“Don’t mention it,” Harry replied with a wave of his hand. “You don’t deserve to go to Azkaban.”
“Thank you, but actually, I meant your testimony for my mother.” Harry had spoken on behalf of Narcissa on Tuesday. His testimony had been the crucial component leading to her exoneration. There was little to be done about Lucius though. Even with the evidence that some of his crimes may have been committed under the influence of the Imperius curse, there was still too much against him to keep him from being charged. His trial was scheduled for mid-July.

Harry blinked. “Yeah, of course. She really did save my life, you know.”

Draco smiled. “She’s a good person, deep down.”

“I’m sure she is,” Harry offered with a nod. “Have you had any luck convincing her to meet Hermione?”

Draco shrugged. “Not yet. But I’m not pressing it too much right now. With my father’s trial coming up and my questioning today it didn’t seem like the right time to challenge her deep-seated prejudices.”

Harry nodded and glanced at the door, beyond which they were sure Hermione was delivering an impassioned speech about Draco’s redemption. The Boy-Who-Lived smiled slightly. “Well, if anyone can change her mind, it’s Hermione.”

Draco smirked. “She changed my mind. I can’t imagine her being any less successful with my mother.”

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Draco and Hermione fought all day after her testimony, and she was still cross with him most of the day on Friday, but as soon as he received his owl from the Ministry her anger disappeared and she stared at him wide-eyed, awaiting the results.

No charges filed.

Draco read the Ministry letter three times to be sure he hadn’t misread. The committee had decided that his actions did not merit a formal trial. He would not be imprisoned. He was free to leave the
country if he so desired.

“I won’t be tried,” he announced, dumbstruck.

“Really?” Hermione breathed.

Draco nodded and held out the letter for her to read. “No charges filed,” he said as Hermione’s eyes darted over the parchment in her hands. When she looked up her eyes were full of tears. She let out a shuddering breath and then she was crossing the bedroom with determined steps.

She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him full on the mouth, the letter falling from her hands as her fingers clutched at his hair. His arms encircled her waist and he lifted her up, her legs wrapping around his waist. Her kiss was hard and desperate and he returned it earnestly.

“I’m still mad at you for lying to me,” she said quickly before kissing him again.

“I know,” he mumbled against her lips.

“And we’re definitely going to continue discussing it later,” she continued, trailing kisses across his jawline and down his neck.

“Mmhmm,” he hummed, turning them and walking toward the bed.

“And if I hadn’t testified, you would probably be facing trial,” she chastised, her teeth nibbling his earlobe.

“Yes, I owe you so much,” droned Draco. “Now shut up and kiss me again, witch.” He lowered her to the bed and leaned over her, relishing the darkening look in her eyes. She drew her bottom lip between her teeth for a moment before arching up, seeking his touch.

Her lips met his as her fingers darted to the buttons of his shirt. She was breathing hard already, a warm red flush spreading over her neck and chest. He ran his hand along her heated skin, from her jawline and down her neck to palm her breast through her shirt.
Hermione finished the last of his buttons and pushed his shirt over his shoulders. He shrugged it off while she sat up enough to pull her cotton shirt over her head. “Take your trousers off,” she demanded, reaching around her back to unclasp her bra.

Draco’s cock twitched at her words and he smirked. “Yes, ma’am.” He stood up to unbutton his trousers and let them fall to the floor along with his pants. Meanwhile, Hermione was shimmying out of her skirt and knickers and tossing them aside. Then she reached out to grab his hand and languidly laid back against the pillows.

“Merlin, I fucking love you,” he said, burying his face in her curls to trail hot, open mouthed kisses down her neck.

With a moan, Hermione threw her head back, her hand reaching down to grasp his hardened length. He thrust against her hand as his lips found one of her pert nipples.

“Draco,” she gasped, arching against him and giving him a torturous squeeze. He groaned and reached down to ghost his fingers against her slick folds. He circled her sensitive bud until she was keening beneath him.

When he finally pushed into her, she let out a gasp. He had to close his eyes to keep from losing control as she rolled her hips against him. With a groan, he thrust forward sharply and she cried out. He began a slow and steady pace, all the while adorning her face and neck with heated kisses and gentle caresses. She snapped her hips up to meet his with every thrust, her fingers gripping his hair roughly.

He reached between them to make quick circles against her center as he increased his speed. He could feel the familiar tightening that signalled his impending release, but he knew he could please her first.

His thrusts were becoming a bit erratic, and he could feel Hermione’s walls beginning to flutter around him. He loved watching her face as she came undone. Her brows furrowed in deep concentration, her teeth drew in her bottom lip, and then her eyes and mouth flew open wide in ecstasy. Her back arched off the bed and she stilled for a moment before shivering and quivering around him with a moan and a sigh.

Three more thrusts and he followed her over the edge with a grunt. He collapsed forward, panting. Hermione’s fingers raked through his hair as they both recovered.
He kissed her with a smile before shifting off of her. He pulled her against his chest, pressing lazy kisses into the crook of her neck. She chuckled and nestled against him. “How do you feel?” she asked.

“Like a free man.”

~*~*~

August 1st, 1998

Draco arrived to the Australian Ministry with a rush of dizziness and a throbbing in his knees from the force of the landing. The spent portkey clattered to the ground next to him and a witch in teal robes rushed forward to retrieve it. “Welcome to Sydney, Mr. Malfoy. Would you care for a potion to help with the disorientation?” She offered him a small phial which he took gladly. As soon as it passed his lips the dizziness subsided.

“Thank you,” he choked out.

“We just need to check over your travel permits and then you can be on your way,” she explained.

Draco handed over the documents he had gotten at the British Ministry and the witch looked them over carefully before handing them back with a smile. “Everything seems to be in order. Enjoy your stay.”

It had been over two months since Hermione had left for Australia. Despite his freedom to travel internationally, Draco had decided to stay to allow her to have the initial reunion with just her parents. He had never spoken with muggles before. He was terrified of saying something that would offend them while they were just trying to regain their memories and re-acquaint themselves with their daughter.

According to Hermione’s updates, it had taken her three weeks to locate them and then five weeks of diligent work with the memory expert to reverse the damage done. They were back to normal now, save for the occasional small memory lapse, and Hermione couldn’t wait to introduce Draco to them. It would be a few months more before the Grangers packed up their life in Sydney and moved back to their home in Kensington, so Hermione suggested that Draco take a week to visit them here. He couldn’t be more nervous.
She was there when he exited the office and greeted him with a warm smile and a tender kiss. “I missed you,” she sighed.

“I missed you, too.”

“Come on. My parents are at a café down the street. They can’t wait to meet you,” she said with a grin as she pulled away from him and began to walk toward the exit.

Draco hesitated. “Do they...did you ever tell them about me? You know...before?” He could imagine Hermione in her younger years, writing angry letters to her parents about the mean boy at school who called her horrible names and thought he was superior to muggles.

Hermione frowned. “They may have heard a few stories,” she admitted. “But they won’t be meeting that boy today. They’re much more interested in meeting the man who I fell in love with. The one who saved my life.” She reached forward to place her hand against his cheek adoringly.

Draco thought about that for a moment. Surely she had been the one to save his life. He wasn’t going to correct her now though, not when she was smiling at him like that. Not when there was a diamond engagement ring back in England just waiting for Hermione’s father’s blessing and the right moment. If she thought he had saved her, he was perfectly content to let her believe that forever.

He nodded and she stood on tiptoe and gave him another kiss, her arms encircling his neck to pull him closer. “They’re going to love you,” she promised as she pulled away.

And then she grabbed hold of his hand and they walked together into their next adventure.

Chapter End Notes

And there it is! Let me know what you think. If you like it, tell your fic-loving friends about me! I love hearing things like ”a friend told me about this fic.” That's one of the biggest compliments a writer can get!

This is the end of this story, but I have several other stories in the works! If you like my writing, subscribe to me here and follow me on Tumblr: HGinny25 to find out what I'm working on next.
These new stories include a dark war fic which will be told from Draco's POV, and a fluffy, smutty post war fic that I think will be very fun for all! I'm also dipping my toe into the pool of fests! So stay tuned for all of that over the next few months.

Seriously, thank you all.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!