Sugar and Spice
by InLoveWithForever

Summary

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A mind-boggling amalgamation of confusion followed by a peripheral realization, and then instantaneous fear made her flush so severely that the room went fuzzy around the edges of her vision as she choked out the lie.

It was old parchment housed in the restricted section, tart green apples, and something spicy—not cinnamon, cloves?—that lingered inside her nostrils. She was woozy, her lids drooping heavily, even as a small part of her brain screamed at how wrong this was. A larger, louder part of her shoved the shame down in favor of baser instincts. Those instincts dampened and dissipated and the shame crowded in the further removed she was from the delicate, unmistakable scent wafting from the cauldron.

WINNER of Mischief Managed Award (Best Recently Completed Story) 2019 Enchanted Awards
WINNER of Summer Lovin’ Award (Best Love Story) 2019 Enchanted Awards

Notes

A/N: Hello!
The first chapter is a short prologue set in sixth year, but after that, it's all eighth year. And the subsequent chapters will be significantly longer.
Comments are appreciated!
I hope you enjoy :)

I'm also on tumblr at inlovewithforever. My asks are open to prompts. Come say hi!
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Ignoring the jeers of her classmates, Hermione peeked through her riotous curls to the other side of the room where the Slytherins sat in pairs. Malfoy snickered, his cool gray gaze flashing from hers to the boy he sat beside, Nott, who wore a softer smirk that still managed to make her stomach swoop riotously, dangerously. They were laughing at—her? Ron? Her and Ron? She tore her eyes away before she stumbled and truly made a spectacle of herself.

Twenty minutes later, she gathered her books and followed Harry and Ron to the Great Hall where, despite the leaden feeling in her gut, she picked dutifully at her plate and failed to keep her eyes from wandering to opposite end of the hall where—

Malfoy was staring at her, his long, unreasonably elegant fingers cradling a gleaming green apple that he tossed from his left hand to the right with a graceful flick of his wrists. She tore her eyes away and feigned a stomachache, escaping the hall in favor of wandering amongst the stone halls with her disjointed thoughts for company.

One of those stray thoughts plagued her into Transfiguration, buzzing in her mind during dinner, all the way to when she climbed beneath the covers of her bed and drew the curtains for privacy from Lavender and Pavarti’s giggles.

Parchment she understood. Apple was easily attributable. Together they made sense, as much sense as something rooted in... feelings instead of logic could be sensible, even if she judged herself for it terribly.

*Malfoy.*

She swallowed down her discomfort at the mere thought of his name, at the secret way his name made her ache in new to her and old as time ways. She wasn’t supposed to feel like this, not about him. Revulsion, yes. Objective admittance that one had good bones and fine eyes and perfect teeth? That was one thing. But that wasn’t what the potion signified. That sort of attraction? No, never. Why, *why* had the wires inside her crossed? What was wrong with her that she could feel *this* for someone who hated her?

Hermione took a shallow breath in, the scent gone, but not forgotten, and frowned. There was that question again. In the six years she had known Malfoy, not once had she ever caught the scent of clove on his person, not even abstractly.

It was a mystery, and so by default she ached to solve it even if nothing good could from it. No.
Nothing would come from it. Hermione shut her eyes. She had more important, more immediate concerns to fret over.
Hermione frowned at the smooth, unmarred surface of wood before her.

The table was new, absent of ink stains and pockmarks made by bored students who’d rather be anywhere but the library. Not her. For the first time in months she could finally breathe, hidden amongst the stacks at her favorite table.

Well, not the table. That one was gone. She slid her chair—also new—closer to the replacement table and for a moment she was tempted to shove aside the thought of why the tables and chairs here in her favorite spot had been replaced, had warranted replacing to begin with. The temptation to shove it down, to ignore, to shut her eyes and pretend this was just another school year was seductive.

And wrong. Too much blood had soaked into the very stone of the castle—Lupin’s, Tonk’s, Fred’s, Lavender’s, the list went on—for her to deserve the ability to turn a blind eye when she was still standing and they weren’t.

She wouldn’t wallow, her friends wouldn’t want that, but ignorance and lies—even those told to herself, perhaps especially those—would achieve nothing. She had one year left and she vowed to face it, all of it, head on. She was a Gryffindor and she best act like one.

Hermione retrieved an alchemy text from the bottom of her accumulated mountain of advanced books. Unlike the desks and chairs, the books were old and unscathed, warded against most anything that could lead to disrepair, including but not limited to the hexes and curses hurled during the Battle, like the ones that had—

“Nose already buried in a book, eh, Granger?”

Her fingers curled around her wand, instinctive. Protego, stupefy, expelliarmus, along with a good number of nasty jinxes hovered on the tip of her tongue, but she restrained herself. The war she’d been embroiled in for the last seven years in one form or fashion was over, even if at times it didn’t feel like it.

Fingers no longer on the proverbial trigger, she infused as much steel in her spine as she could muster and forced her chin up. Theodore Nott stood on the opposite side of the brand new table with a grimace on his pale face, his dark blue eyes stormy and locked on her wand atop the table.

“Sorry,” she muttered.

With the sort of disaffected poise only a Slytherin could display, Nott arched a dark brow. “Apologizing for what, your erudition? That’s a new look on you.”

She blinked, twice. Smoothing the—was this a conversation? Had she ever had a conversation with Nott? Once or twice, maybe, and only ever to ask him to pass her an ingredient in the potions cupboard. So no, most of her experience with Nott had been of the looking and not speaking variety.

Whatever this was, sweeping her gaffe under the rug was rather un-Slytherin of him when he could lord her war-worn nerves over her head. Then again, he was likely just trying to ignore the fact that she’d nearly hexed him six ways to Sunday for sneaking up on her.

Yes, that was it. As one of only a handful of students returning for an eighth year and one of even
fewer returning Slytherins, Nott most likely wanted to make this year as smooth as possible.

Intentions aside, Hermione could be just as big a person as Nott. “No, though I believe we’re all entitled to turning a new leaf this year if we choose.”

Maybe that was a little too on the nose, because he stared for a moment, so long and fraught with words not spoken that it took everything inside her not to squirm beneath his unblinking gaze. Merlin, his eyes were bluer than the Great Lake and just as difficult to read.

Slowly, he nodded, his eyes dropping to the text splayed in front of her. He smiled, no more than the barest curl of the edges of his lips, but it made her stomach swoop with an intensity that stole her breath. Of all the things the war could’ve killed and didn’t, this just had to live on.

If she was being honest with herself, and she had just promised to do so a minute before, she might not have ever had a true conversation with Nott, but she had noticed him. Plenty. He was friends with Malfoy, she’d reasoned at the time. Important to keep tabs on anyone in his circle. But honestly? There was something about him that made it difficult to look away once she started.

“Everything up to chapter eight was dreadfully dull, but it picks up around chapter twelve,” he said.

“I—what?”

The smile playing at the edges of his mouth grew until the barest hint of his perfectly straight front teeth was visible. “Had a fair deal of free time on my hands this summer. Managed to get ahead on my reading.”

Of course. House arrest while awaiting trial for suspected war crimes—though he’d been cleared on all charges—afforded nothing but free time.

His knowing something she didn’t knocked her off kilter, but she could recover. “It could be argued topics are only dull when not understood.”

If Nott was offended, he didn’t show it. His smile persisted as he rounded the table, slowly, hands visible, and wand tucked away inside his robes. Slow as his approach was, her heart thudded, rabbit fast as he came close enough that she could smell him.

“Maybe once you catch up, you can explain it to me, Granger.”

The text in front of her eyes turned to gibberish as Nott left her floundering in a haze of clove scented confusion.

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It was her comment about turning over a new leaf, her dogged insistence to be an example of bravery that made her approach the occupied desk on the left side of the room rather than one of the empty tables. It had nothing to do with how Nott looked and definitely nothing to do with how he smelled or how she liked it. Nothing.

“Do you mind?” she asked, nodding to the stool beside him.

His eyes did a lazy sweep between her and the seat. If he was surprised, he didn’t show it. He reached down, fingers gripping the wooden back of the stool before drawing it out for her to sit. “By all means.”
Hermione sat, albeit awkwardly. Had he seriously pulled her chair out for her? Who did that? Aristocratic Purebloods, apparently. Only, why had he pulled out the chair for her? A new leaf? Unless, perhaps she’d spent so much time with Harry and Ron that a display of decent manners shocked her these days. A gentle throbbing took up residence in her temples. Enough trying to solve this particular puzzle.

Someone cleared their throat, and it wasn’t Nott. She turned and—her heart froze, lodged somewhere much too high inside her chest.

Careless wisps of pale, moonlight hair rested against his forehead as he stared down at her, his gray eyes giving nothing away.

She opened her mouth to speak, but what did you say to someone you—did she hate him? That didn’t sit right, not when she’d signed her name to a written testimony that was undoubtedly responsible in part for why he was here and notrotting in some cell in Azkaban. Still, for all intents and purposes they’d been enemies up until—when? When did that change? Had it changed? The war might’ve been over, but she wasn’t foolish enough to believe that Voldemort’s death had magically—ha—eradicated the beliefs that allowed him to rise to power in the first place. She didn’t hate him, but she was only one half of the equation, now wasn’t she?

Merlin, when did she start having more questions than answers?

Apparently Malfoy didn’t suffer from the same affliction that made her mute. “Granger.”

There was no malice, not even a hint of it. He hadn’t even sneered.

Still, her knees knocked beneath the table as she dug deep for the gumption to greet him when the last time she’d seen him had been in the Great Hall, he and his parents cloistered together at a table set apart from the rest, their faces just as grim and wan as everyone else’s. And the time before that…her arm burned beneath her sleeve. “Malfoy.”

Her voice didn’t tremble. Twenty points to Gryffindor.

Now that they’d very politely established that, yes, they were in fact aware of whom the other was—astounding really after seven bloody years—they could get on with what he wanted. Nott was his friend; did Malfoy want her seat? She wasn’t about to cow to a demand to move like some peasant, but he hadn’t asked. She could offer. In fact, she could kill two birds with one stone because frankly, what had she been thinking choosing to sit here of all places? “Did you want to sit?”

He’d grown into his features, his angles still sharp, but his chin less pointy. And he’d filled out, no longer gaunt and his under-eyes no longer bruised purple. He nodded, just once.

Her knees knocked again and she made to stand, only to pause as Malfoy reached for the stool to her right, effectively boxing her in between the two Slytherins.

“Oh, I didn’t—”

Malfoy looked down at her from the corner of his eye. “Is there a problem, Granger?”

Where to start?

But she wasn’t about to fold, not if he wasn’t. “Not in the slightest.”

She swiveled to face the front of the classroom where she could avoid the two, cool sets of eyes watching her silently.
It was much too late to move seats now, however desperately she wished to be anywhere else. She’d have to grin and bear it and switch seats next class. She could handle another…fifty six minutes of this.

Saved by the proverbial bell. Professor Babbling took to the front of the room and briefly welcomed the combined class of seventh and returning eighth years back before launching into an introduction of what they could expect in Runes for the rest of the year.

Hermione followed along until, from her left, Nott slid a folded piece of parchment across the desk. Not intended for her, but for Malfoy, who must’ve anticipated the gesture or caught it from the corner of his eye because he reached for it, managing to snag the sheet with subtlety and speed. Seeker reflexes were handy.

Malfoy scribbled something on the same sheet and passed it across the desk with a flick of his wrist.

Honestly? This was what she got for trying to— really, why had she chosen this seat? House unity? Letting bygones be bygones? Blasted blind bravery she chided Ron and Harry for, jumping before looking? Whatever reason, she could kick herself. The nerve, passing notes back and forth like impudent first years when—

“And I assume you all can be trusted to arrange your own meeting times outside of class?”

Wait. “What?”

Nott caught her muttered question and replied with his own whisper, “Our group project.”

Around the room, a low chatter broke out amongst tablemates.

Oh. Oh. Bugger.

“Does this evening work for you?”

“This evening?” she echoed.

Nott pinned her with his blue stare. “I imagine you’d rather start sooner than later, yes?”

Right. Right. Yes, she would. “This evening is fine.”

Not like she had other plans.

Harry and Ron weren’t here, instead having chosen to start their careers as aurors rather than finish their schooling despite her urging that it was only one year and an education would never be a waste of time. They hadn’t listened, had spent most of the summer undergoing extensive, fast-track training with the DMLE and were now official junior aurors. Being the Chosen One and the Chosen One’s Best Friend apparently afforded privileges like moving up the bureaucratic ladder more quickly than reasonable, though she kept that last bit to herself after a particular awful row with Ron who took her hesitance to mean he didn’t deserve the position. Which wasn’t what she meant. No one was qualified to be an auror at eighteen after a few short months of training.

Merlin, she’d been offered a job in the Department of Magical Creatures and in the Department of Mysteries, both of which she had turned down for a variety of reasons, more reasons than she had fingers or time to explain. No doubt the offers would still be there if she changed her mind.

Not that she was alone at Hogwarts, either. She had Ginny, only she was rather peeved at her for
ending her supremely short-lived romance with Ron. Luna had returned, but she’d been dottier than usual after—well, everything. According to her, the whole castle was filled with wrackspurts and if that wasn’t a metaphor, Hermione didn’t know what was. And of course there was Neville… only she had seldom seen his mouth unattached to a girl’s lips since he’d sliced Nagini in two. Being a war hero had many perks, apparently. She huffed, only to flush as both Nott and Malfoy looked at her, brows arched in question.

She hurried to speak lest they ask her the reason behind her undignified reaction. “After dinner? In the library?”

*With a candlestick.* She bit back another huff of irritation. Often her brain was helpful, occasionally not so much. Perhaps Luna wasn’t the only dotty one.

Nott and Malfoy shared a look before Theodore took point, nodding. “All right.”

She fiddled with her quill, pretending to jot down notes on her parchment when really she needed something to do with her hands.

Just what had she gotten herself into?

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She hadn’t bothered to ask where in the library they all intended to meet, and yet her feet carried her through the stacks in the direction of where Nott had stumbled upon her the day before. Something in her gut told her this was where she’d find them.

And she did. Only—wow. She *really* wasn’t expecting to find them huddled together, Nott holding Malfoy’s hand to his mouth, pressing what looked to be a…a *kiss* to Malfoy’s knuckles.

An undignified gasp slipped from between her parted lips, loud enough to send both boys’ heads turning.

She took a step back and shook her head. “Sorry! I—”

How was she supposed to finish that? She didn’t mean to intrude on what looked like a very private moment in an altogether public place? Or, she was sorry for not knowing Nott and Malfoy were… an item? Friends didn’t exactly kiss each other’s fingers. Better to bite her tongue than make a fool of herself.

If they were upset that she’d seen them, they didn’t show it. Nott lowered his and Malfoy’s clasped hands to the table, but he didn’t let go and Malfoy didn’t try to pull away. They both simply stared at her like she was the one behaving oddly.

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“Sorry for what?” Nott asked.

A wave of *déjà vu* washed over her.

If they weren’t going to make a thing out of it, neither was she. The war had stolen enough from everyone in one way or another that if they’d found a slice of happiness, well, great for them. Honest.

Hermione crossed the remaining feet necessary to reach the table and took a seat across from the pair before laying out her belongings. Her quill to the right of her parchment, her books to the upper left. When she looked up, the two were watching her, faces awash with varying shades of amusement. Thankfully none seemed to be the cruel sort.
“Kneazle got your tongue, Granger?” Nott asked.

“I’m sorry?”

He chuckled beneath his breath. “You keep saying that. How polite.”

“What?” Nott shrugged. “We’re supposed to be working together in this nice little threesome for the foreseeable future, yes? I’m merely suggesting we air any and all grievances now, lay them down, spread them all out on the table, so we can move on. So go on, Granger. Give us your worst.”

She was stuck on threesome, and lay down, and spread out, and the way the words rolled off his tongue, too stuck to speak for a moment. And when she finally could, what was she supposed to say? If she listed every damn problem she had with them, well mostly with Malfoy, they’d be in the library past curfew and Pince wouldn’t care for that one bit.

“I don’t—” She cleared her throat. “I don’t have any relevant grievances.”

Nott laughed. “Give us your irrelevant ones, then.”

He caught that?

The question must’ve been written on her face because he continued, “You’ve been spending too much time with Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dumb if you thought that little subtlety would elude.”

That rankled. Not enough for her to fire back a retort, but enough that her face heated, eyes narrowing. “What I think is that we should discuss our assignment. That is our reason for being here, isn’t it?”

Malfoy shifted, attempting to remove his hand from Nott’s, presumably to grab his book, but Nott held tight, unwilling to let him or the topic go.

“Red really is a great color on you, Granger. Not the ginger sort, no he was a bad look, but that flush in your cheeks makes you look positively—”

“You want my grievances, Nott? Where should I start?” She was done trying to be polite. “I find you both to be arrogant prats. You’ve been terrible thorns in my side on your best days and absolute pricks on your worst.”

Now that she’d started, she couldn’t stop. She turned to Malfoy who hadn’t asked for any of this but she hadn’t asked for the seven years of bullying he’d subjected her to, now had she?

“And you”—It seemed he knew what was coming and braced himself, his jaw hardening and his knuckles turning white for how hard he was gripping Nott’s hand. “You’ve been a bully and an insufferable, cowardly git and that blood purity nonsense your family touts has gotten you nothing but short stays in Azkaban and centuries of inbreeding that I’m nearly positive is responsible for turning certain members of your family into deranged psychopaths with a penchant for torture and the rest into lily-livered cowards who’d rather roll over for a snake-nosed bastard with father issues than own up to their own shortcomings. And speaking of father issues, I think you have them in spades and—and—and quite frankly your chin is too pointy.”
She was panting by the time she finished, her breaths heaving as she blinked fast because—no. Merlin, no. Of all the daft things she could do, she refused to cry.

Nott dipped his head toward Malfoy’s and cleared his throat. Malfoy was pale—paler than usual—and a little green around the gills, but he lifted his head and met her eyes, staring down his nose. “My chin is perfectly shaped, Granger.”

She laughed. Or at least, she thought that’s what she was doing until she couldn’t see and her face—no, her face was wet because she was crying. Veritable sobs were making her shoulders shake and so she did the only thing that made any sense.

She stood from the table and ran.
It was poetic, truly, that the bathroom she found herself in was the very same she’d holed up in during first year. There were no trolls this time around—small favors—but the shame, for all the impetus was different, felt very much the same.

No one had come out of the war unscathed. Everyone had PTSD, some worse than others. It wasn’t her intention to bury her head in the sand and pretend she wasn’t emotionally and mentally battered, but she didn’t exactly relish the fact that her nerves and emotions were so shot that one terse confrontation with Malfoy—who hadn’t even said anything except that bit about his chin—sent her to tears.

Troll or no troll and embarrassment aside, she couldn’t remain hidden in the ladies’ forever. She’d left her bag and belongings behind in the library which meant heading back to retrieve them, and face Malfoy and Nott once more. Hopefully they’d be willing to sweep her outburst under the rug, like Nott had yesterday when she’d been a little too quick on the draw with her wand.

Blotting her eyes with a tissue she then vanished, she left the lavatory and ran smack dab into the human equivalent of a brick wall. A little oomph slipped from between her lips as she staggered back a step. Two arms rapidly reached out to keep her from falling on her bum.

The scent of clove assaulted her senses.

*Theo.*

Righting herself, Hermione took a step back, placing enough distance between their bodies that his arms dropped back to his sides. She met his eyes, eyes that unlike hers weren’t red-rimmed and glassy but instead dark and sharp. “Thank you. I was just on my way back to the library.”

For the first time, a fraught silence passed between them. He reached up, scratching the back of his neck before sighing. “I came to apologize.”

She crossed her arms. “For what?”

“I guess I deserved that.” He laughed briefly before sobering and staring directly into her eyes in a way that left her feeling uncomfortably vulnerable. “I’m sorry for goading you, which was what I was doing in case you weren’t sure. I was needling you until you—”

“Burst?”

He lifted one shoulder in a lazy shrug that somehow didn’t make him look like a slouch, but like he had more worthwhile things to do than pour his whole self into such a simple gesture. All he
needed was a Muggle leather jacket and a cigarette and he’d give James Dean a run for his money, a total wizardly rebel without a cause. Or maybe it was just plain aristocratic nonchalance. “I really did mean it, the part about you airing your grievances. I thought it better to get it out of the way now in a predictable, controlled setting than wait for it to happen under less desirable circumstances.”

She chewed on that, worrying her lip. “You’re acting as if it were inevitable, the airing of my grievances.”

He graced her with another arch of his brow. “What’s that saying, the truth will out?”

Not that she was particularly fond of his methods, but her grievances as he called them, had been simmering for so long that maybe her outburst was long overdue. Since third year, probably, when she’d actually punched Malfoy. “So what, you decided to face it head on? That’s practically Gryffindor of you, Nott.”

“And I suppose I should take that as a compliment from you? Doesn’t bravery get your lot, I don’t know, hot?”

Her eyes widened, making him laugh.

“Don’t get your knickers in a twist, Granger. Besides, it was rather self-serving of me, lest you worry your pretty little head about my true colors.”

It was her turn to lift a brow in question. “What, listening to me berate you and your—your boyfriend was self-serving? I didn’t realize you Slytherins got off on that sort of thing.”

She stumbled over the word, the context of it new.

His eyes flitted over her flushed face. It was unsettling, the way he studied her as if he could see everything she wasn’t letting on. Wasn’t meaning to let on.

“It’s like that Muggle treatment, bloodletting?” he said, finally.

She rolled her eyes. “Bloodletting is archaic pseudoscience seldom practiced in this day and age.”

“I’m making an analogy, Granger. Do try to keep up.” He smirked. “My point is, doctors would bleed patients, right?”

Right…slowly, she nodded.

“So if a patient was infected or poisoned with—”

“That wasn’t why they did it.”

Nott stared.

“Bloodletting was practiced to rebalance the humors. The Ancient Greeks believed the bodily fluids or ‘humors’ had to be in balance for proper health, so they would bleed patients in order to prevent or cure just about any ailment, thinking the root cause was an imbalance of too much blood.”

“Any ailment, other than poisoning?” he asked.

“Yes.”
She could see it in his eyes, the word hanging between them unspoken. *Muggles.* She glared, just daring him to say it.

He didn’t. He shook his head and sighed, but kept the derision from his words as he continued, “Fine. Scratch the bloodletting analogy. Consider an infection. The first thing you have to do is clean the wound and drain it of pus and—*honestly,* I was aiming for poeticism and it’s quite difficult to make pus poetic.”

“Best stop while you’re ahead. Not that your plan was that great, what with all that talk of draining poison from blood. Really, did you forget with whom you were speaking?”

“Har har.” He glared, albeit weakly. “I wasn’t speaking about the cleanliness of your blood, the notion of which is a load of rubbish and I swear that on whatever honor you believe I possess. I meant, in order for a person or a wound to heal, you have to remove what ails it or else it festers and spreads.”

She turned that over. “In the library, that was you *draining the wound*?”

He nodded.

Maybe she wasn’t the only one who’d come to the conclusion that everyone had at least a touch of PTSD. Not that anyone in the magical community would call it that, but what Theo was alluding to was basically talk therapy.

“Why didn’t you ask Malfoy to air his grievances?”

Nott frowned. “He doesn’t have any.”

Now *that* was funny. She laughed.

“He doesn’t,” Nott repeated. “Just like me, his only concern was when you were finally going to explode. Whereas, I was concerned an unmitigated explosion might entail you hexing his bollocks off, Draco would’ve stepped in front of your wand and taken the castigation *gladly.* So no, Granger, he doesn’t have any grievances. At least none toward you.”

His stance was casual, but the set of his jaw just dared her to say something. It was obvious Nott truly, *deeply* cared about Malfoy.

Keeping her mouth shut, she stepped around him and set off for the library, pausing only to look over her shoulder. “Are you coming, or would you rather linger outside the ladies’?”

Nott kept a step back, his stride much longer than hers. They walked down the corridors in silence, save for the sound of their shoes against the stone. Upon reaching the entrance to the library, Nott reached out, pausing her steps with a gentle touch of his fingers to her elbow that still made her jolt. “If it’s all the same to you, might I air a grievance?”

She shifted on her feet and looked at him askance. “I suppose that depends on what your grievance is.”

Her heart thudded painfully in her chest. *Quit imagining if my boyfriend tastes like apples,* Granger. Oh Merlin, he wasn’t a Legilimens, was he? That’s just what she needed.

He smiled another one of those rare, full-fledged grins that made his cheek dimple and her stomach *swoop* *stupidly.* “Quit calling me Nott. Call me Theo or Theodore if you must, but not Nott. It reminds me of my father and honestly I’d rather not be reminded of my parentage if it can be
helped.”

Unlike Malfoy’s father who had gotten off with a rather light sentencing of one year in Azkaban followed by three years of house arrest, Theo’s father had been sentenced to fifty years in Azkaban for a slew of crimes, including but not limited to use of the Unforgiveables against Muggles. He could rot for all she cared.

Apparently Theo didn’t care either, because it didn’t appear to be grief that twisted his features, but rather something akin to disgust. If she correctly remembered the court documents she’d sneaked a peek at—and she did—Nott senior had also been charged for use of the *Cruciatus* curse against his son. His disgust was warranted, as was his request.

“Theo, it is.”

With that, they reentered the library and followed the snaking path around the shelves to their table where Malfoy was slumped over in his seat looking wan and fraught. Despite herself, something panged inside her chest at his dejected, torn expression. It was the same he’d worn for most of sixth year. What did that mean?

When he caught sight of their approach, Malfoy straightened, his face carefully blanking. Theo returned to his seat, but not before brushing his fingers along the back of Malfoy’s hand as he passed.

Hermione sat, spine ramrod straight, and eyed Malfoy warily across the table. For all Theo swore Malfoy had no grievances, she’d believe it when she saw it. Or didn’t see it, as the case may be.

Rather than pick up where they left off and continue with the awkward and rather painful airing of grievances, Theo cracked open his book and actually got down to business. Thankfully he filled her in on the parts of the group assignment she’d missed when her attention had flagged during class without her even needing to ask, a small mercy.

Only, the longer he spoke, the more her stomach was filled with a heavy sense of dread. This project was going to be…involved. Professor Babling certainly wasn’t going easy on them just because they’d survived to see another year, no. Not that she wanted easy, Merlin no, but even divvying up portions of the workload, it was going to be absolutely necessary they meet a minimum of three times a week, if not more. Talk about exposure therapy.

It was decided they would adjourn until the following evening, same time, same place, preferably without the same drama, the last bit going unsaid. She didn’t have it in her to cry two days in a row. It was exhausting.

Poised to make a quick getaway, her plan was thwarted when Malfoy cleared his throat. “Granger, if I could have a moment?”

She and Theo both stared, first at Malfoy, and then at each other.

She couldn’t say no, could she? Well, she could, but that would pretty effectively undo much of Theo’s wound draining, wouldn’t it?

With a nod, she let her bag slip from her shoulder. No need to carry it when her shoulder was already aching from heaving it to and fro all day, and she didn’t know how long this would take. “Sure.”

Malfoy shot Theo a look she wasn’t about to begin to interpret. She’d had enough puzzles in the last two days to last a lifetime. “I’ll meet you in the common room.”
Theo sent Malfoy an equally weighty look before leaning in and brushing his lips against Malfoy’s in a chaste kiss. She should’ve looked away, should’ve given them some shred of privacy, but she couldn’t. Her eyes were locked on the practiced, no, instinctive tilt of their heads to keep their noses from bumping and the way they simply fit. She should’ve looked away and because she hadn’t, because she couldn’t, now her stomach was burning worse than all the times she’d stumbled on Ron and Lavender snogging.

Her flush intensified when Theo drew back just a hair and flicked his gaze over to hers as if he knew was watching. The corner of his mouth tipped up as he stepped away. “‘Night, Granger.”

“How’s it going?” she blurted. “If I’m to call you Theo, you should probably call me Hermione.”

If Theo found her request strange, he didn’t show it. Instead, he nodded and sauntered off through the stacks, leaving her alone with Draco and her mortification.

A moment passed with only her heart beat in her ears.

“You and Theo are on a first name basis now?” Malfoy’s voice was quieter, softer than she’d anticipated it being and lacked the malice he’d spoken to her with for years when he deigned to speak to her. He sounded as tired as she felt.

She shrugged. “Yes. He requested it.”

“Careful. He’s the sort to take a mile when given an inch.” Again, he said it with a certain fondness that negated the warning. Except…

“That’s a Muggle phrase. An American Muggle phrase.”

Malfoy lifted his brows. “A condition of my sentencing. I’m required to take remedial Muggle studies. My lessons began this summer.”

She let that sink in. “Oh.”

To grin and bear the lessons as a means of satisfying a Ministry requirement was one thing, to incorporate Muggle phrases into his vernacular was something else entirely. She held her tongue. About that, at least. “Did you want to discuss Theo’s predilection for pushiness, or was there something else you wanted to talk about?”

“He means well.” Malfoy raked his fingers through his hair, leaving the strands a mess that a younger, poncier Malfoy with his penchant for using too much gel would’ve been aghast at. “But no, that’s not what I wanted to discuss.”

His jaw shifted forward and back before clenching.

“I wanted to apologize.”

They were three for three. If she never heard another apology, it would be too soon. But her earlier rant had bestowed her with equal parts shame and relief, so who was she to deny him his due?

“Okay.”

She expected he might give her a blanket apology for his misdeeds, maybe rattle off a few of his more grievous actions, the memorable ones. What she hadn’t anticipated was Malfoy withdrawing
a thick, folded square of parchment from the pocket of his trousers that he then proceeded to unfold and smooth with his thumbs, thumbs that were trembling slightly. Her breath caught in her throat as he started to read.

“First year. I’m sorry for laughing when you asked me to help you search for Longbottom’s toad on the train. I apologize for calling you an annoying swot when I referred to it as a frog and you corrected me.”

He remembered that? Merlin, she barely remembered it and she was the one who—no. Not going there.

“I’m sorry for saying I wished the basilisk had gotten to you in second year. I’m sorry for the time I tried to jinx Potter and enlarged your teeth instead. I’m sorry for saying your hair resembled a bush. And a nest. I’m sorry for trying to get that hippogriff killed…”

He kept going, apologies pouring out from his lips with an increasing speed until he tripped over his words.

“I apologize for the many times I referred to you as—” The breath whistled from between his lips as if someone had socked him in the stomach. “You know.”

Her hand dropped to her left forearm where the word was carved, grizzled lines forever marring her flesh in a reminder that to some people, it didn’t matter how bright she was, how many classes she performed outstandingly in, how brave she acted, how bold, she’d never be good enough. Simply because she hadn’t been born good enough. “A Mudblood?”

His whole body winced, jerking. “I’m sorry. I’m sorry for the times I sneered and told you not to touch me because you were dirty. It was cruel, it was a lie, I lied and it was so wrong. I was wrong. I’m sorry—”

“Stop,” she croaked. “Please just stop.”

This trip down memory lane was…too much. Maybe before her hunt for horcruxes and all that had entailed, she’d have relished in his apologies, but not now. The stupid war and all its losses had left her raw and weary and so fucking tired of the pain, be that her own or pain inflicted upon others.

And it was too much for him, too, clearly. His face was entirely drained of color and his hands were outright shaking as he gripped the parchment like a lifeline. And yet he rolled his shoulders back and shook his head. “I’d like to finish.”

“I get it,” her voice warbled pathetically and her nose was bloody stuffy. “You’re sorry. You’ve made your point, Malfoy.”

“You don’t,” he hissed, voice rising, making her jump at the sudden volume and inflection that made him sound far too much like he used to. “Every awful thing I’ve done and said, I remember and it’s eating me alive.”

And that was his cross to bear, not hers.

Only Theo’s words about Malfoy’s willingness to step in front of her wand and gladly take a hex floated through her mind. She didn’t need to hear it, but maybe he needed to say it, say all of it. Draining the wound.

She dipped her chin in acquiescence.
He was nearly through it seemed, because before long he came to the apologies that made her hands shake and she didn’t have a bloody piece of parchment to grip for dear life.

“I’m sorry I didn’t stop her. I’m sorry I just—I just stood there. I’m sorry. I’m so sorry and I’m sorry that’s not enough.”

She was sorry, too. Not about that, but that the world had been cruel enough to put two teenagers in a position where such apologies needed to be made.

Malfoy let the paper flutter to the table and dropped his hands to his sides. His eyes were still locked on hers, red-rimmed and haunted, but thankfully dry. “I dream about it you know. That day. I hear Aunt Bellatrix cackling and all I can see is you bleeding on the carpet screaming and each time it happens, I swear I’ll do something, something different, stop her or light the whole bloody place on fire, but I never do. I just stand there. Like a coward. And waking up is no reprieve because nothing changes. I’m still a coward.”

Hermione wiped under her eyes. She’d had her fair share of nightmares, and no doubt this night would be plagued with terrible dreams, too. After a day like today, how couldn’t it?

She took a deep breath. “I don’t know. I’d say that this was rather brave.”

His lips curled in a sneer reminiscent of an earlier time, an earlier version of himself. “I don’t need you to patronize me.”

“I’m not,” she snapped. “I wouldn’t waste my breath if I didn’t mean it.”

He shook his head, disbelieving.

“You could’ve swept it under the rug or sent me an owl or a bloody fruit basket if you were so inclined, but you didn’t.”

Malfoy was quiet, staring down at the parchment on the table. The sheet had gone slightly transparent around the edges from where his hands, damp with sweat, had gripped. “I hated you, Granger. I hated everything about you—your hair, your friends, your house, the fact that you got better marks than me, how our professors liked you better than me, that you weren’t born into this world and yet somehow everything came so easy to you. I hated you for all of it. But I never wanted you dead, believe me that. And there’s nothing brave about letting someone corrupt you until you’re willing to do unspeakable things or stand by and watch as others do them just to save your own arse.”

Her mouth was dry but still she licked her lips as if she could wet them. “You said hated.”

He stared.

“As in past tense.”

“You’re asking if I hate you still?” He laughed, the sound broken and wrong. “No. I don’t know when I stopped, but I certainly didn’t hate you when you were writhing on my drawing room floor.”

She nodded. He’d been a bully and yes, a coward, but war was different. It was easy to hate someone as a child, but as an adult who knew what it meant to hate? Who had seen death? Torture? She wasn’t sure when she stopped hating him, either, but it was so long ago that it felt like a distant memory she’d give anything to never relive.
“Mostly now I just hate myself.”

Her stomach ached, heavy and hard and yet somehow churning riotously all the same. She swallowed down the acid burning in her throat and took a deep breath. “For what’s it worth, I forgive you.”

She really did. God knows when that had happened, but it wasn’t brand new, wasn’t born from his apology. It had probably happened at the same time she stopped hating him, whenever that was. Her forgiveness really had nothing to do with this, had more to do with the look in his eyes as she’d squirmed and bled on his floor. There’d been no malice, none towards her, as his aunt had carved her up and *Crucio’d* her until it felt like her innards were outside her body and she’d wet herself from the pain. The look in his eyes hadn’t been hatred or disgust, hadn’t been that of the boy who’d tormented her.

It was shame and remorse and fear and something that looked a hell of a lot like he knew what it felt like, the fire surging through her veins and the desire for it to just *stop* even if it meant dying. Like he’d spent a time or two writhing under, if not his aunt’s, someone’s wand.

He wasn’t a hero, but Malfoy was braver than he was willing to believe.

Even if she hadn’t forgiven him by then, she’d certainly forgiven him by the time she’d given her written testimony proclaiming his innocence, that if it hadn’t been for him failing to identify Harry, the war would’ve gone very differently.

Did he know she’d testified? Most likely. Well, now he knew why. *Part* of why, at least.

“I don’t know how you can say that.”

She shrugged. What was she supposed to say? Forgiveness was another one of those feelings not rooted in her head, but in her heart. And she’d had just about as much success with the matters of her heart as she’d had divining tea leaves. “I just do, Malfoy.”

There was a heavy weariness weighing down her bones. She was exhausted, tired from the war, tired from the pain physical and otherwise, tired of the apologies given and received. She was just *tired* and she didn’t have it in her to drudge up more bad memories in hopes that she could turn her feelings into quantifiable reasons strong enough to persuade Malfoy of the veracity of her forgiveness.

“I don’t think I’ll ever be able to forgive myself,” he confessed.

They were at an impasse. She’d forgiven him, but she couldn’t make him believe it, nor could she make him forgive himself. And if he wanted her to do something awful…retaliate…punish him to make him feel better, he was out of luck. She was no sadist even if punching him in third year *had* felt good.

He must’ve known it, too, because he shook his head, a sardonic little smile twisting his mouth. “Not really your problem, though, is it?”

No, but that didn’t mean she wanted him to torture himself over it. They’d all had enough torture to last several lifetimes.

“The war is over, Malfoy. We should probably start acting like it.”
Three meetings was all it took for their tentative truce to go arse over kettle.

The first two meetings had been…polite, almost stilted. As if she and Malfoy, and Theo to a lesser extent, were dancing around each other, trying too hard to be nice, so hard that their personalities were a little…disingenuous. The charade could only go on for so long before cracks appeared in the act. Theo’s idea of draining the wound and airing grievances had been a great idea in theory, had cleared the air of the most monumental, ugly issues between them, but apparently they were due a climactic explosion no matter how much effort they put into avoiding one.

Maybe she didn’t hate Malfoy, but he was lousy at translation and apparently obsessed with driving her bonkers about the dumbest things and it was so unexpectedly awful she didn’t know what to do with herself.

“That is not what that means. You’re completing ignoring how grammatical construction of the thirteenth century was different from that of the fifteenth century. There’s two hundred years’ of linguistic alteration you’re trying to apply to the text that doesn’t yet exist.”

Malfoy rolled his eyes. “Last time I checked, one always meant one, Granger.”

“Sole.” She stressed. “It means sole, as in alone.”

Theo cleared his throat, eyes focused on the text before him. “Are we sure we’re not all interpreting this incorrectly? Could it mean togetherness?”

“No!” she and Malfoy shouted at the same time before they glared at one another.

“Volume!” Madame Pince poked her head around the shelf, glaring sharply from behind her spectacles.

Seriously? She bit the inside of her cheek. “Sorry.”

Pince huffed and slunk away to her post, there and gone, leaving them to their stalemate of an argument.

“It can’t mean togetherness,” she made sure to keep her tone even and volume low. “If that’s what it meant, how do you explain the fact that the entire preceding passage discusses civil war?”

“Wars end,” Theo said, shrugging. “It’s logical. They were separate and now they’re together again.”

“Maybe it’s meant to be won,” she said, brushing her hair out of her face. All this debating was making literal heat rise from her scalp which wasn’t doing her hair any favors. “Not one, you know? We’re applying our understanding of today’s English to a translation that in Old English doesn’t stand up.”

“What happened to you saying it was one as in alone?” Draco rolled his eyes.

“Only one side can win,” she snapped. “The victors won and they’re…alone…in their victory.”

Even Theo snorted at that reach.

Draco scoffed. “Just admit you were wrong, Granger.”
“Well, you weren’t bloody correct, either, Malfoy.” She took a deep breath. Getting this heated would accomplish nothing. They were meant to be working together as a team on this translation. “It doesn’t mean the numeral one.”

“It doesn’t mean alone either.” He was smirking, his stupid lips tilted upward like he found her frustration amusing.

“How about you tell me what it does mean?” she gritted out.

Malfoy went quiet, staring at his textbook for long enough that she nearly lost hope of him ever responding. “Solitary. They aren’t the victors. They’re the losers, the banished. They lost the war and they’ve been isolated.”

“That’s not—” Wait. Maybe that was… “Huh.”

It made sense, was a rather… astute interpretation. She dropped her gaze to the text, cheeks flushing. Maybe he wasn’t totally hopeless after all.


Never mind. One astute interpretation didn’t make him less of a prat.

“No,” she bit out. “I’m only saying it could fit. I’ll need to read through the following passages to make certain.”

Malfoy grinned, full of himself. Gods, why couldn’t he have an ugly smile that made his cheeks fat or his eyes too small? Ugh, he had to look stupidly attractive while gloating? The Gods were cruel.

“Say I’m right, Granger.”

“No.”

Theo huffed. “Children.”

She scoffed. “Children? Try child and tell that to your boyfriend.”

“Hey.” Malfoy cut his eyes. “Watch it, Granger.”

“Or what?” She leaned forward, gripping the edge of the table as she stared him down, heart pounding. “You’ll do what, Malfoy?”

Theo slammed his book shut making them both jump. “You’re both acting like children and Pince is going to kick us out of here if you don’t simmer down.”

She bit the inside of her cheek. “It’s not my fault Malfoy can’t read.”

“You insufferable little—”

“Out.” Pince appeared seemingly out of thin air.

“See?” Theo muttered under his breath.

And that was how she was kicked out the library for the first time in eight years.

***
Maybe it was stupid—it was certainly *something*—but the apple had been all but glaring at her from its bowl atop the dining table. She’d tucked the fruit inside her bag with a single-minded intention, a purpose she was now executing one week after their first meeting. She set the apple down in front of Malfoy and waited.

He stared at it like it might bite him, his brows drawn low over his eyes. “What’s this?”

Theo nudged him with an elbow. “I believe Hermione’s brought you an apple, Draco. Say thank you.”

Malfoy rolled his eyes. “Are you trying to poison me, Granger?”

She shut her eyes. This was going so well. “Just take the damn apple, Malfoy.”

*“Why?”*

She gritted her teeth, perturbation from their last meeting rearing its head. “Do you like apples or not?”

The answer was obvious, still clung to her nose like it was just yesterday she’d stuck her head over the cauldron and wafted the bloody fumes of the most asinine potion to ever exist.

“I’m also quite fond of Ogden’s finest, but I don’t see you bringing me a bottle of that.”

Theo covered his mouth with his palm, but a snort escaped him.

“If you must know, it’s a peace offering.” She was tired of spending each meeting second-guessing everything she’d said, too on edge to focus properly, unsettled in her own skin. And with how the last meeting had culminated in their being expelled from the library, each of them frustrated and her, storming off because getting kicked out of the library was *not* something she did, something she had to give. “Last week was…it’s in the past. This is a new week so I was trying to set the tone.”

*“With an apple.”*

She did *not* stomp her foot, but she did let loose a tiny, library-appropriate huff of indignation. *“Fine. I’ll take it back.”*

Her fingers grazed the smooth, unmarred skin of the fruit before it was jerked out of her reach. Malfoy tsked. “Now, you can’t take it back. It’s *my* apple.”

Theo's shoulders were shaking, his lips pressed together so tightly they were white at the close. And Malfoy, well, he was cradling the fruit in his palm and bloody well *smirking* and—

Oh. *Oh.*

They weren’t taunting. They were *teasing*. Teasing like how Ron and Harry did, poking fun at her good naturedly, even the way they went about it was a little more..nuanced, sharper than Ron and Harry’s more obvious jeers. A new tone, indeed.

Suddenly their stupid argument about rune translation seemed just that—stupid. Maybe they simply needed to find their footing, establish a sense of balance and harmony. Their interactions couldn’t be all polite, gentle words—their personalities were too sharp for that—and it couldn’t be unmitigated arguing. *Balance.*

Flopping down in her chair, she laughed beneath her breath and tried to ignore the heat blooming in
her cheeks. “Are you always this difficult?”

“I’ll let you in on a little secret.” Theo rested his elbows on the table and leaned in, dropping his voice. “He’s actually quite easy.”

The spot right beneath her belly button twisted, not too dissimilar to the unsettled feeling of apparating.

With the hand not holding his apple, Malfoy shoved Theo’s shoulder. “Slander and lies.”

“For me, you’re easy.” Theo snatched the hand Malfoy had smacked him with and held tight. His voice had gone hot and liquid smooth, not unlike the Ogden’s Malfoy had professed to liking.

Yes, Malfoy was quite contrite about all his misdeeds, but there was something else different about him. The Malfoy she knew was cool bordering on frigid. Even when Pansy had hung all over him, he’d been staunchly apathetic, never returning the affection, not openly at least. Stiff upper lip was rather an understatement. So this casual affection, allowing Theo to hold his hand and tease him in front of her of all people was…disconcerting.

She cleared her throat. Just in case they’d forgotten she was there.

Theo glanced at her from the corner of his eye. “Where’s my peace offering, Hermione?”

She laughed it off, only Theo stared at her, blue eyes creased at the corners as he continued to—well, not smile, but it was something close.

“Wait. Are you serious?”

Theo lifted his brow. “I’m feeling rather slighted.”

Boys.

She rolled her eyes. “Is there something we need to make peace over?”

It was lightning quick, blink and miss it fast, but Theo’s eyes darted to Malfoy and back to hers. “Is there?”

The twisting beneath her belly button intensified. He was looking at her like he—

Like he knew.

No. No one knew because it made no sense and it wasn’t—it wasn’t a thing, let alone an obvious one. There was nothing to know, nothing to…bugger, she was back to lying to herself when she’d sworn she wouldn’t.

So it was a thing. A small thing. Easily extinguishable.

She just couldn’t let on otherwise until she’d figured out how to douse it.

Plus, there was no way he could know the half of it.

With a nonchalant little shrug, she reached inside her bag for her book and the notes she’d made for their project earlier during her free block. That way she didn’t have to look at him when she said, “Even if there was something to make peace over, which as far as I’m concerned there isn’t, I don’t even know what you like.”
He quirked a brow. “But you know Draco likes apples.”

_Double bugger._

“Doesn’t everyone know that? He’s always eating them.”

Had her voice gotten higher?

Malfoy leaned back in his chair. “Theo likes Muggle clove cigarettes. It’s why he always smells the way he does.”

Huh. Maybe she’d been on to something with that whole rebel without a cause vibe he seemed to possess.

Theo turned his palms up in a little shrug and shot her a wry smile. “Nasty habit.”

“You smell nice.” Oh no. No, no, no, she did _not_ say that. “I mean, _they_ smell nice. It’s not an offensive odor like nicotine.”

They were both staring at her like she’d sprouted enough heads to give Fluffy a run for its money.

She cleared her throat. “But like I said, there’s nothing to make peace over so you can fund your own habit.”

Slowly, Theo’s lips curled in a grin that was altogether feline. Cheshire, even. “Well, I think an important point still stands. We don’t know nearly enough about each other, do we?”

Despite being the only Gryffindor in attendance, she felt like she’d stumbled into the lion’s den. Snake’s nest was more apt, really.

She swallowed, only it was audible, a damn gulp. “I suppose.”

“So it stands to reason we should rectify that, no?”

“We should?”

Theo leaned back in his chair and clutched his chest, feigning injury with an accompanied groan. “You wound me.”

She giggled. _Giggled._ Merlin, if Ron and Harry could see her now. On second thought, better they weren’t witness to this particular showing of madness.

Stranger even than her bout of giggles, Malfoy was grinning.

“We’re supposed to be working on our project. You know, the whole reason for this little tête-à-tête?” she reminded.

“A project that was assigned _last week_ and isn’t due until…” Theo stared up into the left and wiggled his fingers as if he was performing a complex calculation. “_Months_ from now. Our meetings last week were plenty productive. Live a little.”

_Live a little? _Merlin, she’d lived several lifetimes, hadn’t she? Or was it that she’d dodged Death more times than was reasonable? How much _living_ had she really done?

“Leave off, Theo,” Malfoy said, smirking. “There’s no use trying to persuade her. Granger’s all work, no play.”
What was his game, trying to goad her into—what, chatting? Why?

She cut her eyes. “I know better than to rise to the baiting of two Slytherins.”

Malfoy dropped chin and leveled her with a stare from beneath his lashes. “Only trying to speak your language. Though, I wouldn’t call it baiting. It was a dare.”

Oh, the nerve of him.

With a resolute flick of her wrist, Hermione slammed her book shut. “Fine. Let’s get to know each other, then.”

Potentially wicked motives aside, Malfoy had issued a dare and that wasn’t something she could just turn down, not without looking like a total coward. She’d just need to her watch her back and think before she spoke. Not that she didn’t already, but a touch more caution wouldn’t hurt.

The look Theo gave her should’ve warned her that this was a very bad, no good idea. She should’ve immediately packed up her bag and bowed out, courage and honor be damned, because nothing good could ever come from a look like that. It was the sort of heavily lidded stare that Pavarti and Lavender had whisperingly referred to as panty melting. As it stood, her knickers were not in any danger of transfiguring from a solid into a liquid, thank you very much, but they were rather damp. Arsehole probably didn’t even know the effect he had. Or he did, which was far, far worse and entirely befuddling that he’d turn his charms on her.

With a calm demeanor to belie the racing of her pulse, she clasped her hands atop the table and waited.

Malfoy chuckled beneath his breath. “It’s not an interview, Granger. Relax.”

And so she did. Outwardly, at least.

It started off rather innocuous, enlightening really. Oddly enough, Theo seemed to know far more about her than she knew of him to the extent that he would ask her a question, only to answer it himself before she had the chance.

“Favorite candy? Sugar quills, right?” or…

“Favorite color? Let me guess. Violet?” That wasn’t even obvious, wasn’t one of her house colors. How in Merlin’s name did he know that?

Seldom was he wrong and it was…unsettling.

On the other hand, she learned loads about him—and Malfoy, too—all number of facts that no amount of mere looking over the years had divulged.

Along with clove cigarettes, Theo had an affinity for pumpkin pasties and Shock-O-Choc, whereas, Malfoy’s sweet tooth lent itself to acid pops and other tart sweets.

Unlike Malfoy, Theo didn’t play Quidditch, but he wasn’t as bored to tears over the sport as her. His favorite color was gray to Malfoy’s green—predictable—and his favorite class was Transfiguration. Malfoy’s favorite? Potions. At least he laughed when he said it, as if he knew how unsurprising it was.

They steered clear of anything too dark, but before long the mundane questions morphed into hypotheticals that toed the line. Would you rather ride a thestral or a hippogriff? Theo shivered
and answered hippogriff, which said plenty. Malfoy grimaced and replied *neither* until pressed to give a real answer which was a thestral and he delivered his answer with a contrite look lobbed her way.

*Would you rather watch Fitch and Pince snogging, or McGonagall and Flitwick?* All three grimaced and went with the lesser of the two cringe-worthy options, their transfiguration and charms professors.

*Would you rather spend an hour alone in the Forbidden Forest or swimming in the lake?* She was quick to remind them that she’d been there, done that which by some elusive thread of logic prompted Theo to grin and ask, “Is Krum as good in the sack as the rumors state, or are they just that?”

Her jaw dropped, mouth popping open even as a flush wrapped itself around her neck and along the underside of her jaw. “How would I know?”

“He was your date to the Yule Ball, wasn’t he?”

“Yes, in *fourth year.*”

Theo cocked a brow. “And your point is?”

She huffed. Wasn’t it obvious? “It was fourth year! No one was shagging in fourth year.”

“Loads of folks were shagging in fourth year.” Theo laughed. “Merlin, Draco here was shagging Pansy back then.”

Malfoy shut his eyes. A groan rumbled from his chest. “Can we *not*?”

She opened her mouth, a question on the tip of her tongue. No. That wasn’t—no. Better not. She pressed her lips together.

Of course Theo, who apparently had a knack for noticing *everything,* witnessed her moment of hesitation. “Go on. Ask.”

On the one hand, it was prying. On the other, Theo had given her permission and he’d been forward enough to pry into her sex life, or lack thereof. “When did this”—She tilted her head at them—“happen?”

It was Malfoy who answered with a straight face that gave *nothing* away. “Sixth year.”

Huh. The affection between them, here in the library at least, was so obvious. How had she not noticed before? She’d certainly been paying attention, more attention than she should have. So how had she not picked up on it? Had they been keeping it a secret?

Theo made a flourishing gesture with his hand. “Follow-up question?”

Well… “Does everyone know?”

Everyone other than her as of last week.

Malfoy shrugged. “It’s not a secret, Granger.”

Maybe it wasn’t now, but it had been? Draco had been rather preoccupied during much of sixth year and…well, probably not the best idea to flaunt a relationship when you were carrying out the orders of a mad man with a penchant for dastardly retribution who was willing to do whatever it
took to bend his followers to his will, including threatening loved ones.

“Does your family know?” she finally asked, looking at Malfoy.

For all that the Wizarding World was antiquated in some ways, they were rather progressive in others, compared to Muggles at least. But Purebloods had proven themselves more conservative than other circles; did that translate to matters other than blood status?

He met her eyes. “Of course. My mother is like a bloodhound with secrets. Sniffs out truths before you even know them yourself.”

Theo drummed his fingers against the edge of the table. “Draco’s mum loves me.”

Malfoy rolled his eyes. “She tolerates you, trust me.”

“Please. Narcissa finds me charming and affable.”

“I believe she said your charms were laughable.”

Hermione snorted, rather indelicately, unfortunately.

Theo turned his eye on her and grinned. “So I suppose if you haven’t shagged Krum, that puts a damper on my plan to ask who was better in bed—him or Weasley.”

She choked. Honest to Merlin choked on an inhale which led to a coughing fit so severe her eyes watered and she might’ve sent a spray of spit across the table.

One of them—who knew which since her vision was a blurred mess—transfigured an inkwell into a goblet, and augumentied it full of water before passing it her way. She took a sip, cleared her throat, and said, “Ron and I are not together. We’re friends.”

“You were, though. Right?” Theo pressed.

Malfoy, however, looked vaguely green.

She rolled her eyes. He’d made his distaste for Ron clear from day one. But to look ill at the mention of his name was a little melodramatic. “For two weeks.”

After which she’d ended things, much to Molly Weasley’s dismay. Ron’s ego had been bruised, but it just didn’t feel right, being with him like that. Kissing him outside the heat of the battle was like kissing a brother and two weeks hadn’t changed that. After a week spent licking his wounds and stomping around the Burrow, Ron had pulled her aside and admitted she’d been right. They didn’t fit, not like that. There were no hard feelings and thankfully their friendship had come out the other side unscathed. Had their attempt at romance gone on any longer, that might not have been the case.

Theo frowned. “Huh. And in those two weeks you didn’t…?”

Didn’t…?

He huffed. “Shag?”

“No!” She scoffed. “No. No.”

“Interesting.” Theo hummed.
“There’s nothing interesting about my sex life!” She snapped. An additional wave of heat washed over her at Theo’s chuckle. She shut her eyes. “I mean, my private affairs are of no interest to you and so I’ll thank you kindly to quit.”

“I don’t know, I’m finding this all rather enlightening.” Theo smirked. “So that’s a no to Krum and Weasley. Who have you shagged, then?”

“That’s none of your business.”

They were both staring, watching her as she twitched beneath the intensity of their eyes. There was no doubt they were cataloguing every fidget and blink, the way her pulse pounded in her neck.

The longer the moment stretched, the hotter her face grew, mortification making her dizzy as the silence morphed into a weighty thing that spoke volumes in and of itself.

There was no talking her way out of this, not with these two who were far better versed in the art of double speak. They’d learned it from the cradle, used it to survive, breathed entendres like air.

Avoiding their eyes which had slowly widened, understanding dawning on them, she snatched her book from the table and shoved it inside her satchel. “I think we’re done for tonight. Same time Friday?”

She didn’t wait for either to reply. Standing so fast her chair nearly toppled, she made a swift exit, her robes ghosting against the back of her ankles as she weaved through the stacks and all but sprinted through the door and out into the corridor.

She was halfway down the hall when a second set of footsteps pounded against the stone from behind her.

“Hermione, wait!”

She must’ve hesitated, or it was his long legs, because Theo caught up to her, stopping only when he pulled ahead and turned, standing right in her path, so near she had to lock her legs to keep from plowing into his chest face first.

“I’m sorry.” He reached back, hand gripping the back of his neck in the way he did when he was uneasy. She was no master of body language, but it was an obvious tell. “I was only trying to—honestly, I don’t know what I was aiming to accomplish, but it wasn’t to make you uncomfortable.”

With a clench of her jaw, she took a step back and drew herself up taller. She still had to crane her neck to look him in the eye from this close proximity. “Who said I was uncomfortable?”

“Hermione…” His tongue darted out, wetting his bottom lip and despite the anger and the frustration and the absolute humiliation that lingered in her system, her stomach clenched. God, she was stupid. Bloody hormones and—and—stupid clove cigarettes that clung to his person. His very close, very tall, very handsome person who just had to up and decide to talk about shagging. “If I’d have known—”

“That I was a virgin, you wouldn’t have made fun of me? Well, sorry to ruin your fun, but some of us spent the majority of our teenage years trying to stop a dark lord and didn’t have time for—for sex.”

That wasn’t true, not entirely. There’d been time, time when the world hadn’t been quite so grim, moments she could’ve stolen in broom cupboards or in the prefects bath or even in the tent while
they’d been hunting horcruxes. Not every second had been spent fearing for her life.

She could’ve slept with Krum, or Cormac, or Ron, but they weren’t who she thought about at night, tucked away in the silenced privacy of her curtained off bed. They weren’t on her mind when she shut her eyes and slid her hand beneath the cotton of her knickers. They didn’t get her wet, didn’t ease the way for her fingers to slip inside and curl, never deep enough to reach the place she wanted. Their names weren’t on her lips as she slicked her wetness to her clit and circled fast and hard until she came.

Yes, she could’ve stolen away into closets and bathrooms, but not with whom she wanted. So she hadn’t bothered. She wasn’t going to die a virgin—well, it had been touch and go there for a while—but she’d wait until she could do it with someone she actually desired. Until whom she wanted wasn’t whom she currently wanted.

Which was why she needed to leave, needed to end this conversation and scurry back to the privacy of her dorm.

“We weren’t making fun of you, I swear it.” His eyes were wide and his full lips pulled down slightly at the corners. “Draco jokes that I’m pushy, which in all honesty, I can be and patience isn’t a virtue I possess, either. I’d like very much for us to be friends, and I figured, what better way to accomplish that than acting like we already were. It was rude of me.”

When he put it like that, her anger mostly melted away. In its place was a strange sense of contrition that made her chest clench. That and her embarrassment intensified two-fold. Had she overreacted? A bit. And she’d come across as priggish to boot. Ugh. “Friends?”

Theo nodded. “Yes.”

She bit her lip. Could she do that? Moving on was one thing. But to be friends? What would Harry and Ron think? Friendship wasn’t momentary madness, wasn’t just laughing in a library or carrying on a polite conversation. It was a commitment. She took her friendships very seriously, and for all that Gryffindors and Slytherins differed, that they had in common. Slytherins perhaps chose their friendships with an even greater degree of care.

Friendship meant everything to her, and from the way Theo was looking vaguely ill and unfamiliarly vulnerable as he held his breath waiting for her answer, it mattered to him, too.

Ron and Harry were her friends, yes.

Which meant if they didn’t like what she did, they had an obligation to get over it.

“Friends.” She nodded. “On one condition.”

Theo waited, his dark brows arching upward.

“I’d like a week’s moratorium on any and all apologies.” She cracked a smile. “I don’t know about you, but they’re exhausting and I’ve had about enough to last a lifetime.”

Behind her, a low voice chuckled. She turned, and there was Malfoy, leaning against the stone wall several meters away. How long had he been standing there?

She quirked a brow and before she could talk herself out of it, took a leap of faith. “What about you, Malfoy? Would you like to be friends? On the condition you won’t get me kicked out of the library again.”
Forgiveness was one thing. He’d told her he no longer hated her, no longer found her inferior, but friends?

She’d seen him sneer, watched him smirk and even snivel once or twice. But never this, this look of absolute gob smacked shock married to—Merlin, was that hope? His eyes were wide and his lips parted and his face was pale other than two slashes of red that grew large right on the sharp crests of his cheeks. He glanced at Theo and back at her, mouth opening and closing, and the words could’ve been printed on his forehead for how clear the question was on his face. *Are you serious?*

Merlin help her, she was.

She waited.

“Yes,” he croaked. “I’d like that.”
Chapter Four

Chapter Notes

I'm honestly overwhelmed by the comments and kudos so far! I really wasn't expecting much since I know Draco/Theo/Hermione isn't to everyone's taste, so I'm pleasantly surprised and extremely flattered at how this is being received so far.

I hope you enjoy the update!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Deep breath. “I don’t think that’s what it means.”

Theo shot her an encouraging smile.

Malfoy appeared to take several deep breaths as well before responding tightly, “And what do you think it means, Granger?”

So far there had been no yelling, no arguments that made her want to rip out her hair, and names called. In fact, the meeting had gone rather smoothly thus far, no squabbles regarding the translation arising…until now. At least he seemed as dedicated to working through their difference of opinion in a calm, cool, and collected manner befitting their fledgling friendship.

Pointing at the series of runes in question, she said, “I don’t think plague is meant to be interpreted literally, as in pestilence, but rather a curse.”

“Curses can cause illnesses,” Malfoy argued. “Boils and pox and necrotic limbs, to name a few.”

She fought the urge to grit her teeth. “Not magical curses, I mean it metaphorically.”

“You’re arguing that plague is a metaphor for curse which is…another metaphor?” He arched a brow.

Theo cleared his throat loudly in as if silently reminding them to keep it civil.

“Yes. That’s what I’m saying,” she said. “A curse as in the more…Muggle interpretation of invoking ill will. You know, to wish misfortune upon an enemy.”

Malfoy stared from across the table, lips pursed in a scowl. She held her breath, waiting for him to say something against Muggles.

“As in a plague upon both their houses?”

She opened her mouth and shut it without speaking. What in the world was she supposed to say?

Malfoy smirked.

“Yes.” She nodded tightly. “That’s—that’s exactly what I mean. I wasn’t aware you were learning Shakespeare in your Muggle studies lessons.”

“Oh I’m not.” That insufferable smirk on his face grew larger. “I chose to read it, no lesson
required. I was bored, thought I’d do a bit of light reading.”

Shakespeare wasn’t exactly light reading. His works, his *words*, required thoughtful analysis, and his turns of phrase seldom held one meaning, but rather several interpretations. His plays weren’t something you could just flip through idly, Gods no. Did Malfoy even fully appreciate what he’d read?

Then again, she considered thick magical tomes to be pleasurable reading, so maybe she wasn’t in the position to judge what literature one deemed as *light*. Better to encourage Malfoy’s foray into Muggle literature than damn how he went about it. She smiled. “What did you think of Romeo and Juliet?”

He shut his textbook and shoved it to the side, making room to prop his elbows on the table. His bloody smirk hadn’t budged. “I hated it.”

She blinked. “I beg your pardon?”

Theo sighed heartily. “He we go,” he muttered.

“It was absolute rubbish. Romeo was a git and Juliet was a daft bint. They knew each other for a day and they were in love? My arse. I don’t understand why people laud it as a romance when they kill themselves in the end.”

*Seriously?* “It’s not a romance, it’s a tragedy and cautionary tale.”

Malfoy rolled his eyes. “The tragedy was how nonsensical it was. He never even explains why the Capulets and Montagues hated one another.”

“For any number of reasons.” Blood feud, perhaps? She bit her tongue.

“And he couldn’t have picked one?” Malfoy scoffed. “Lazy writing, I’d wager.”

*Lazy writing?* Oh Merlin. She clenched her hands into fists until her nails bit into her palms and then relaxed her muscles slowly. One breath, two. “Okay. So you didn’t enjoy Romeo and Juliet —”

“I didn’t *not* enjoy it, I loathed it with the fiery intensity of a million blazing suns,” Malfoy said, a stupid, gloating grin on his face.

Deep breaths. “Fine. You loathed it. Have you read any of his other works?”

“I have. I most recently read Taming of the Shrew. Quite enjoyable that one.”

Of bloody course he did. “Gods, could you be more predictable, Malfoy?”

“What?” He lifted his palms. “It was a lovely story, Granger. Great message about waspish swots.”

“Waspish? Seriously? What, *if I be waspish, best beware my sting?* It’s a decent warning, one to take to heart.”

He dropped his lids, and shrugged. “*No profit grows where is no pleasure ta’en.*”

What in the bloody hell did he mean by that? Was he enjoying pushing her buttons? She scoffed. “*There’s small choice in rotten apples, Malfoy.*”

Theo cleared his throat. “Would you like me to give you both some privacy?”
She froze. Merlin, when had she begun to lean across the table? She had nearly crawled across the
damn thing and Malfoy wasn’t any better, his arms braced against the wood as he halfway stood
from his chair. Quickly she fell into her seat, face on fire. “Privacy for what?”

Theo dropped his chin, briefly shaking his head. When he looked up, it was through his lashes.
“I’d suggest this was foreplay if I didn’t know better.”

And just like that, all the blood drained from her face. “That’s absolutely absurd.”

“You wish, Granger,” Malfoy said it with that same arrogant drawl he always spoke with, but
unlike her, his face was growing redder by the second.

She scoffed, in part to keep her voice from trembling. “In your dreams.”

“You have no idea.”

Wow, that almost sounded…serious. But the idea of that was laughable, no, preposterous. He had
to be joking. “Har har. Very funny.”

Only he didn’t laugh. He just stared and she stared back, searching his face for some tell, some
sign—there. The corner of his lip twitched. He shrugged. “You’re so easy.”

She rolled her eyes, no longer feeling quite like she was about to pass out. “Git.”

“Swot.” He smirked.

Theo lightly clapped his hands together. “Perfect, now kiss and makeup so we can finish this
section before library hours are over.”

It was a joke, one delivered by Malfoy’s boyfriend no less, and yet her stomach just had to go and
swoop traitorously at the word kiss. Merlin, half the reason her stomach swooped was because it
was Theo who said it.

Malfoy, still pink but otherwise unaffected, pulled a face and stuck his hand across the table.

“You want to shake hands? Seriously?”

He pursed his lips. “Would you rather kiss?”

Huffing, she grabbed his hand and shook it briefly. His palm was warm and slightly callused,
probably from Quidditch, and it took everything she had not to flush from the knowledge that her
own hand was slightly damp.

“It was a pleasure arguing with you, Granger,” he said, shooting her a grin. “Let’s do it again some
time.”

Walking back to the tower, she nearly tripped off the moving stairs, distracted by the idea that it
actually had been a pleasure arguing with Malfoy. Maybe it was because they’d agreed to be
friends or because what they’d been arguing over hadn’t been life or death or really even very
meaningful at all. Sure, it had gotten heated and there had even been some name calling, but it
hadn’t felt mean let alone cruel. Malfoy was witty and the way he smirked when he thought he had
her cornered was infuriating, but also terribly sexy and—

Oh. She was fucked.

***
Friends.

She stared up at the canopy over her bed and chewed on her lip.

The process of willing away her—cringe—*attraction* probably needed to begin with admitting it. Not out loud, Merlin no, but to herself. And she *really* needed to begin the process, because the sooner she could rid herself of these feelings, the better.

Because you were *not* supposed to want to shag your friends or their boyfriends. *Especially* not their boyfriends and on that, she was two for two.

She was attracted to—deep breath—Draco Malfoy and Theodore Nott. The *both* of them, regardless of how little sense it made and how mad they drove her. Stupidly attracted to them, truly, and had been since before that day in sixth year when they’d all sniffed the Amortentia. Honestly, she’d been attracted to Malfoy since the first day she set eyes on him, back when his blond hair was perfectly coiffed and his nose perpetually stuck in the air. Against all reason, all logic, she had had a crush on Malfoy that, despite his bullying and his cruelty and all around pompous nature, had persisted from age eleven to now.

She might not have been a sadist, but the verdict was still out regarding masochism.

That didn’t mean she had *liked* that she felt that way. Quite the opposite. She’d loathed that her heartbeat stuttered and raced when he looked her way, even if it was to sneer. It should’ve twisted his face into something ugly, but somehow he’d always looked beautiful, even when he was hurling the worst names in the book at her.

And it didn’t mean she had liked *him*, either, not really at least. He was aesthetically pleasing to look at and in recent years had grown into a fine specimen of refined masculinity. Even when he had sported the circles beneath his eyes, she’d appreciated the sweep of his hair and line of his jaw. Over the summer he had filled out, all broad shoulders and lean muscles that made it impossible to deny that Malfoy was *handsome* now that he no longer looked like a walking wraith.

Add to that the fact that she hadn’t actually hated him in years, and her feelings became all the more convoluted. Maybe she hadn’t liked him, but she’d noticed him, noticed the way he cracked his knuckles when he was deep in thought and the dexterity in his fingers as he twirled a quill between them during class. How he read potions texts for pleasure and had an insatiable sweet tooth. She’d noticed the changes in him during sixth year, the way he gripped his quill too tight and how once he’d worried his lip until it bled when no one else had been looking. How the circles beneath his eyes had grown darker as he’d grown thinner, the way he trembled when he thought no one was watching.

She’d noticed him, and even at his worst, her crush had lingered.

When her—another deep breath—*attraction* to Theodore had started, she was less certain, but she should’ve known the cloves she’d smelled over the cauldron had something to do with him.

In all honesty, she hadn’t noticed Theo until…third year? Yes, third year. Whereas Malfoy had oozed bravado as a child, Theo had lurked in the shadows. Dark haired and quiet, Theo hadn’t stood out, not until the day she’d witnessed him giving a bunch of homesick first years every last piece of candy he’d purchased in Hogsmeade. One good deed a crush did not make, but she’d begun to pay attention.

He’d been a tall, gangly boy who over the years grew even taller, taller even than Malfoy. He’d gone through an awkward, coltish phase where his limbs were too long and he lacked the grace for
them, but he’d filled out more quickly than Malfoy had. Theo had returned to school at the start of sixth year looking like he belonged in a Muggle rock band, his muscles still lean but possessing a new, coiled strength. And he’d learned how to move, never merely walking, but prowling. With the way his dark hair had fallen against his forehead and the way his equally dark lashes framed his sapphire eyes and his lips—had his lips always been so sinfully full?—she hadn’t stood a chance.

Just as Malfoy’s cruelty hadn’t killed her crush, Theo’s friendship with Malfoy, his constant proximity to Malfoy, had done nothing to snuff out the attraction. He never made jokes at her expense, but he’d certainly laughed.

For a brief blip, she’d reasoned that she was going through a phase. Bad boys. Most girls went through that phase, no? But Adrian Pucey was equally as good looking and just as much of an aresehole, and she never got herself off thinking about him, so it was something else. It had to be.

Eventually, it stood to reason that there was no reason to it. She’d been trying to apply logic to a situation that was altogether illogical. She couldn’t force a square peg into a round hole—well, she could transfigure it, but she digressed.

She’d been attracted to them, and now, the more time she spent with them, the more time she dedicated to being friends, even friends who were occasionally at each others’ throats, the more attracted to them she became. Ugh.

She took a deep breath. Now that it was all out there, admitted, she needed to figure out how to get rid of these feelings. She wasn’t so daft as to think she could rid herself of the attraction. No, she was fine with finding them pleasing to look at, but the feelings that made her quiver and her breath quicken and distracted her needed to go. They were supposed to be working on a friendship and a group project and her feelings were conducive to neither. Though, she probably could stand to at least temper the attraction because nearly crawling across a table during the heat of an argument and thinking about passionately snogging some sense into Malfoy was a rotten idea.

Ruminating over their worst qualities had gotten her nowhere, and that list of qualities was dwindling by the day as one, they worked to redeemed themselves and two, she found herself endeared to their flaws, so that was out. Focusing on their absolutely off-limits nature did the exact opposite of what it should’ve done, instead making them all the more appealing.

What was she to do?

Fluffing her pillow behind her head, she settled in against the mattress, making herself more comfortable.

Maybe she was approaching this conundrum from the wrong angle entirely. Yes, they were off-limits, but she’d considered them off-limits because of who they were, their house, their families, their shared ugly history, the way they frowned upon her for all the same reasons in reverse.

Until recently, she’d been missing a critical piece of information. They were taken by each other, interested in each other, not her, never her. Now, she wasn’t going to assume either of their sexualities. Draco had dated Pansy which could mean he fancied more than one gender, and Theo, well, who knew. Point was, she’d been focusing on how she would never be with them, not how they would never be with her. One could argue it all came down to semantics, but semantics mattered.

They didn’t want her.

Her chest burned.
That was good, a good start, promising. A bit of tough love just might do the trick.

Theo and Draco cared for one another, deeply, had been together over a year. Anyone who mattered to them knew, their friends, Malfoy’s mother. They were serious. It was obvious in not only what they said, but their little actions, the way Theo brushed his fingers against the back of Malfoy’s neck. There was a comfort between them, but also a claim.

Her stomach hardened.

She’d never come between that, couldn’t even if she wanted to. It would be wrong, more wrong than the feelings she harbored in the first place. And they wouldn’t let her. For all Theo talked about wanting to be friends, she’d seen that look in his eyes when she brought Malfoy the apple and the strange tone his voice had taken on when joking about their argument being foreplay. He’d likely hex her if she did something to make him think she wanted Malfoy beyond maybe finding him fit. And Malfoy would probably do the same if he knew her feelings about Theo.

Or worse…if they didn’t hex her, they might laugh.

Silly Granger, thinks she has a chance?

Ugh, and if they discovered she wanted them both? She’d turn her wand on herself, honestly.

Chapter End Notes

The Shakespeare banter between Draco and Hermione is taken from Taming of the Shrew. I hope that was clear, but I do just want to attribute that in case anyone is left wondering. :)
Chapter Five

*Ridicule.*

*Zero chance of anything happening.*

*Being a rotten friend.*

Three reasons for ignoring her feelings. She’d taken to mentally chanting them like an oath each
time she entered the library. So far…well, her feelings were still there but they hadn’t made
themselves obvious to anyone but her. A relative win.

Only, much like their first meeting, Theo and Draco were leaning close, except this time they
weren’t merely whispering and holding hands, they were *snogging.*

Theo’s right hand was cradling the knife-edge of Draco’s jaw and Draco was clutching the front of
Theo’s robes, holding him close and keeping him there as their lips pressed and parted. Theo’s
tongue snaked out, tracing the curve of Draco’s bottom lip. A strangled groan slipped from the
back of Draco’s throat and Theo grinned against his mouth before nipping Draco’s bottom lip.

Her stomach plummeted through the floor all the way to the bloody dungeons and beyond.

Was it possible to be both irrationally heartbroken *and* aroused? She shifted from her left foot to
the right, her core aching and her knickers damp. The answer was yes, apparently.

*Ridicule.*

*Zero chance of anything happening.*

*Being a rotten friend.*

She did what she would’ve done had she stumbled upon Harry and Ginny and snogging in the
stacks and cleared her throat. “Ahem.”

They pulled apart, startling slightly at the interruption. Their lips were swollen, hair mussed, and
their broad chests rose and fell with each breath as they recovered.

She pasted a smirk on her face that felt all wrong, too tight at the edges of her lips. “In the library,
really?”

Then again, were they as open with their affection anywhere as much as they were in the library?
They barely touched in the corridors or in the Great Hall, let alone anything like this.

The crests of Draco’s cheeks turned a shocking shade of red that spread all the way to his hairline.
Theo simply grinned.

Malfoy was the first to speak. “You’re early.”

She nodded. Thank Merlin he hadn’t apologized. “As are you both. Though it’s clear you’ve
discovered a way to pass the time.”

“Didn’t mean to give you a show,” Theo said, even though…well, the way he said it sounded like
he’d meant to do just that. Or in the very least, he wasn’t bothered by it.
Sounding like a prude was low on her list of desires, but sounding like a sleazy voyeur wasn’t optimal either. “It’s fine. Are you ready to get to work, or should I turn my back and give you a few minutes to finish?”

“We’re fine.” Theo licked his bottom lip. “Besides, it would take more than a few minutes for either of us to finish.”

Her flush must’ve rivaled Draco’s, but she trudged on. Rolling her eyes at the innuendo, she settled into her seat. “Well, if we get to work and stay focused, perhaps we can end our meeting early and you can… finish elsewhere.”

They could hurry back to the dungeons to their dorm and strip each other of their uniforms and—

Ridicule.

Zero chance of anything happening.

Being a rotten friend.

Friends did not think about their friends shagging one another. No, she was not supposed to think about what they must look like, Malfoy’s pale skin against Theo’s ever so slightly tanner complexion, their bodies hard and muscles sinewy, their hands so impossibly large, and their cocks straining and—

Merlin.

Her knickers were ruined. She’d be lucky if she didn’t soak through her robes and leave a musky puddle on the seat.

Reaching into her bag for her book, she let her hair fall around her face, granting her a much needed moment to gather herself. When she straightened and brushed her curls aside, Theo was watching her, an amused little smile on his face. Draco, on the other hand, was looking anywhere but at her.

She cleared her throat once more. “Shall we?”

***

The three of them worked together quite nicely, it turned out. Draco and Theo had proved themselves studious, with a desire to achieve high marks that rivaled her own. Even when they joked around, they always managed to reel themselves in before she needed to, which left their work sessions both accomplished and…well, fun. Even their disagreements were refreshing. When was the last time Ron or Harry challenged her regarding something academic?

Never. The answer was never and the difference was oddly refreshing. Even when the disagreements left her infuriated, she felt alive, her blood racing and heart pounding and—stop. She was not going to continue that train of thought.

Usually they finished their work much earlier than planned, and today was no different. Which meant Theo and Draco could slip off to their dorm and finish and she could go to hers and—she would not touch herself to new fantasies of the two of them together. Before, her fantasies had been of Draco and Theo separately based on whatever struck her fancy at the particular time—not that she’d ever thought of them by name, only a dark haired man with blue eyes in one fantasy and one with impossibly light hair and silver eyes in another—but never the both of them and certainly never the both of them with each other.
Now…now her imagination had new fuel with which to burn. But she would not let it. No. Her thoughts would burn her alive. If she couldn’t help but think of them, well then, she’d just have to abstain, now wouldn’t she?

“In a hurry?” Draco asked as she shoved her belongings back into her bag.

Theo had stepped out several moments before to use the restroom, leaving her and Draco alone to tidy up.

She stared. “Aren’t you?”

He stared right back, his face so perfectly blanked that it was impossible to read him. “We didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.”

“You didn’t.” Her hair swished against her neck as she shook her head.

She was uncomfortable, dreadfully so, but not for whatever reason he thought.

Malfoy huffed out a short laugh. “You’re a terrible liar, Granger.”

“I’m not,” she stressed. She needed him to believe her. “I’m not uncomfortable. I’m—”

Jealous. Aroused. Confused. Baffled by her own inability to wrangle her emotions?

He waited as she worried her lip.

“It’s not you,” she amended. “As a general rule, public displays of affection make me—”

“Uncomfortable?” He was smiling.

Her shoulders dropped as she sighed and returned his smile with one of her own. “A bit.”

Malfoy nodded. “Theo’s far more open with his affection than I am by nature, or perhaps my upbringing’s to blame. Nature, nurture, lines blur. It was my decision to keep our relationship inordinately private until this year for reasons I’m sure you can extrapolate, so it’s difficult to refuse him now.”

“Especially when you don’t seem too keen to,” she said. “Refuse him, I mean.”

He tilted his head as if to concede the point. He opened his mouth as if to say something, only to pause before soldiering on. “You and Weasley—Ron.”

His nose wrinkled, not quite in a full blown sneer. Progress happened by centimeters, it seemed.

Was that a question? She hummed neutrally in response.

Malfoy clenched his hand into a brief fist, cracking several knuckles at once. “As your friend,”—that would never stop sounding odd…or maybe it would seeing as it had only been a few weeks—“am I allowed to ask what happened?”

“You mean, why we’re no longer together?”

His mouth pulled to the side in, not quite a sneer, but a slight grimace. “I think people were taking bets on when you would start popping out the next generation of Weasleys.”

She rolled her eyes. “I decided Ron and I are better off as friends.”
“You couldn’t be both?”

Ideally, she’d like to find someone she could be friends with and who she was passionate about, someone she could talk to and laugh with and who got her hot. “I’m not saying it isn’t possible, but the spark wasn’t really there, no fault of anyone. It just wasn’t, so why try to force it and ruin a perfectly good friendship?”

“But you do think it’s possible to be friends and then become more?”

She shrugged. “You and Theo were friends first, weren’t you? You would know.”

He nodded.

“How did—” She cleared her throat. “How did you two…happen?”

She’d been aching to ask, but hadn’t found the right in. Until now.

His right hand reached for the sleeve of his left and tugged on it slightly. A subtle pink flush colored his cheeks. “It’s not a very nice story, Granger.”

Everything Malfoy did, he did with meaning. Nothing was accidental, not about him. So it stood to reason that tugging on his sleeve was more than just fidgeting.

“You don’t have to tell it,” she assured him.

He peered over shoulder and she turned. No sign of Theo. He really had been gone a while.

“It was the same night I was marked,” he said, his voice low and grave.

He said he was marked, not the night he received his mark. Maybe it was slight, but to her there was a distinction. One was passive, the other active, one spelled obligation, the other choice.

She nodded for him to continue.

“I didn’t want it.” So she had surmised. He cleared his throat. “He…the Dark—Voldemort was disappointed in my father. It was either take the mark or…my mother would’ve borne the consequences.”

She wasn’t surprised, not really. Still, her blood ran cold at the reminder of just how close they’d all been to the mad man’s reign. None would’ve been spared from his path of destruction, not even his followers.

Malfoy rubbed his arm through his robes. Did it still ache like hers? “I thought my arm was on fire. It hurt worse than anything I’d ever felt, up until that moment, and when it was over and he was gone, I couldn’t—I couldn’t stop looking at it and knowing what it meant, that everything would be different, that everything already was different and I’d been so naïve to believe otherwise. I’d have probably drowned myself in firewhiskey had I had any, but the manor was dry. I didn’t want to be alone, so I floo’d over to Theo’s and, well, I had myself a bit of a fit, really.”

She could imagine it, Draco breaking down and Theo picking up the pieces and stitching him back together. From what she’d seen of the two of them together, it made sense.

“I didn’t want to think about it. Theo helped me forget.”

She blushed. It didn’t require experience to know exactly what he meant.
“That sounds”—she swallowed over the blossoming lump in her throat—“romantic.”

Draco dropped his chin and chuckled down at the table before glancing up at her through his fair lashes. “It was a rough shag atop the carpet. But sure, Granger, it was romantic.”

She didn’t know whether to laugh or cry or melt through the floor like a ghost.

She sniffed. “Well, obviously it was something seeing as you’re still together.”

His lips twitched. “Something, yeah.”

Her chest ached, her heart pounding out a rhythm of not yours, not yours, not yours.

Before she could struggle to come up with what to say to that, Theo returned, rounding the table. Instead of sitting in the chair, he leaned his hip against the wood, partially sitting atop its surface, and crossed his arms. He smelled more strongly of clove than usual. Loo, her arse. “What did I miss?”

Malfoy shrugged, the move effortless yet possessing its air of regality. “Just regaling Granger with the story of the night we consummated our relationship.”

Good Godric.

Theo’s eyes widened, blink and miss it fast. He hummed. “Good story. Did you tell her the part about the rug burns?”

She nearly choked, nearly.
Chapter Six

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“These runes translate directly to spilling blood, but I feel like contextually it’s referring to murder.”

Theo scooted his chair a little closer to peer at her parchment. “Ah, right. Okay, so if we read further down the passage to the next use, spilling blood paired with the rune that means father refers to—”

“Patricide.” She nodded, lips twisting in a grimace.

Theo smirked, dimple flashing. “Just how I love to spend my Friday evenings. Discussing patricide with a beautiful woman. Draco’s really missing out.”

She chuckled, flushing, even though Theo’s flirting was frequent and meaningless. Merlin, he did it in front of Draco. Of course it was meaningless.

“I’m sure you can fill him in on the patricide,” she said. “And you can do it without it turning into an argument.”

Malfoy was at Quidditch practice, a last minute addition to the schedule in preparation for tomorrow’s match, Slytherin versus Hufflepuff.

He tsked. “It won’t be the same. For starters, I’m not a beautiful woman. The effect will be entirely diminished.”

“No,” she grinned. “But you are a pretty boy. I’m sure he’ll appreciate it coming from you even more.”

Theo craned his neck back and scoffed. “A pretty boy. You wound me. I’m a man, Hermione. But I’m rather pleased to hear you find me pretty.”

He was right. He was a man, tall and broad and so unfairly handsome. And so was Draco.

“My most sincere apologies, Theo,” she joked, mostly to cover up her desire to press her mouth against the stubble on his jaw. “You’re a pretty man.”

She wasn’t going to touch that bit about finding him attractive. There was only so much obfuscation she could manage in one meeting.

“That’s more like it.” He shot her a smile that in true Theo fashion turned sly in the blink of an eye. “It’s funny. You act as if you think Draco doesn’t enjoy your little arguments just as much as you do.”

Shaking her head, she turned back to the text so he wouldn’t see her blush so obviously. “There’s nothing enjoyable about arguing. Save for the bit about being right, I suppose.”

Theo chuckled under his breath.

Eyes still on the text, she jerked slightly when out of the blue, Theo’s fingers approached her face. “What?”
“Hold still,” he said. “You’ve got—”

He reached forward, warm fingertips sweeping the delicate, thin skin beneath her right eye. This close, the scent of clove on his fingers was thick, along with a hint of smoke and something sharp. Ink? She had to swallow. Last thing she needed was to start drooling.

“Blow.”

She blinked away the fog of lust that had slipped over her mind like a gauzy curtain. “I beg your pardon?”

“Eyelash.” He moved his hand back until the slash of black on the pad of his pointer finger became visible, her eyes no longer crossing to see. “Blow and don’t forget to make a wish.”

“I thought that was just a Muggle practice.”

He shook his head, but held his tongue, waiting for her to get on with it.

What did she want? She had everything she wanted other than that which she couldn’t have. Greater will power, maybe? Mental fortitude? Merlin, not just mental, she needed to get a grip on her body, too.

She glanced up at him from beneath her lashes, the ones still very much attached to her eyes and watched him watching her, the look in his eyes dark and inscrutable and…calculating. He nearly always had that look about him, like he was scheming, or he knew something she didn’t and it should’ve set her on edge and—well, it did, but not the way it would’ve done so had the look come from just about anyone else. Theo’s cunning felt dangerous, certainly, made her feel like she was prey, made her throat narrow and her pulse trip, but it didn’t feel destructive. Dangerous like if a wolf decided to give chase to a rabbit, but upon catching it, decided to hold it between its teeth but not bite. A razor sharp line, definitely.

Look in his eyes and the feelings that look stirred aside, it was a silly ritual. She shut her eyes and took a deep breath before exhaling through her pursed lips. When her lungs were empty, she opened her eyes and jolted. Had he always been so close? As it was, he was near enough to see the dark, nearly black limbal rings that surrounded his deep blue irises. His pupils were large, eating up much of the blue, but it was rather rim dim in this corner of the library.

“Good wish?” his voice was gruff whisper that did really terrible things to her resolve, not to mention her core.

She nodded, even though it was a lie. She hadn’t wished for anything even though there were things she wanted so badly she ached.

Spinning back to face the desk, Hermione picked up her quill and continued on with translating the page in front of her.

“Speaking of Draco.”

She froze. “Were we?”

“Earlier, what with the patricide and him missing out.”

Oh. She nodded.

“Are you planning on attending the match?”
“Tomorrow?”

He laughed. “Most highly anticipated game of the season. That’s what everyone’s saying. Hufflepuff’s actually good this year.”

“I hadn’t planned on it,” she confessed. “No offense, but with it being Slytherin versus Hufflepuff, I don’t really have a stake in the outcome. And Quidditch is…”

Dull when not barbaric and terrifying?

“Not really my thing,” she finished.

“Draco would be pleasantly surprised if you showed,” Theo said. “And you know, what with you two being friends now, you kind of do have a dog in the fight.”

“Draco will be too busy flying around at a lethal height trying to grab the snitch to notice if I’m there,” she said, her disdain for the game leeching out into her tone.

“Come on, Hermione,” Theo’s voice took on a pleading edge as he drew on the syllables in her name. “You can sit with me in the stands. It’ll be fun.”

For some inane reason, saying no to Theo’s Quidditch request was much harder than turning down Harry and Ron had been.

Her resolve fractured when she glanced at him, an absolute mistake. His eyes were comically wide, his dark lashes fluttering as he jutted out his lower lip. “Please, Hermione. It can be your Christmas present to me. I promise to make it worth your while.”

He needed to quit saying things like that or else she’d have to change her knickers.

“Fine.” She sighed. “But I draw the line at wearing anything green.”

***

Theo draped a green and silver scarf around her neck.

“I loathe you,” she hissed over the din of fans screaming around them as the players took to the pitch on their brooms.

He dimpled. “Sure, you do.”

Okay, so she really didn’t. It was hard to even keep up the charade of aggravation when the scarf wrapped around her neck smelled like him—clove and spice and just the slightest hint of smoke that conjured up images of curling up in front of a roaring fire and drinking mulled cider. A shiver raced up her spine making her visibly twitch.

Theo noticed and scooted closer. “Cold? See, bet you’re glad I thought ahead and brought that scarf, aren’t you?”

To make matters worse, he tucked his arm around her middle and pulled her snug against his side until there wasn’t even a sliver of space between them. Heart racing, it took everything she had and then some to keep from squirming atop the wooden stands.

“And you couldn’t have packed something less…offensive?”

He tossed his head back on a laugh, highlighting the length of his throat and the prominent Adam’s
apple there. She wanted to press her mouth to his skin, so she bit the swell of her lip instead.

His little display garnered a few looks from the students around them, some staring outright, others going so far as to scowl in their direction.

Par for the course, really.

It was one thing to partner with Theo and Draco for class, something else entirely to willingly spend time with them outside of the library. Considering who she was—war heroine—and who they were—reformed former Death Eater and son of a Death Eater—it was reasonable that they’d get a few looks, a few whispers, even outright questions. The war was still fresh in everyone’s minds.

But it didn’t mean she had to like the attention and it didn’t excuse the outright foul behavior that some had exhibited. The day after she’d spent her free block chatting with Theo and Draco in the courtyard, someone had sent her an anonymous letter calling her a traitor. For Godric’s sake, she’d been awarded a bloody Order of Merlin, first class for her heroic war deeds. Heaven forbid she try to have some semblance of a life after said war.

Easing her friends into her new friendship had certainly been a feat. Ginny and Neville had balked when, a month back, Theo had sauntered up to the Gryffindor dining table and sparked up a conversation with her about the best way to ethically harvest flobberworm mucus and the ecological ramifications of overbreeding them. An odd topic, even odder since Theo wasn’t taking herbology. After a bit of retrospective ruminating, it became clear Theo had only been seeking a harmless subject with which to broach her in the presence of her other friends. In other words, force her hand and make her fess up to her housemates about the friendships she’d been keeping to herself. Easy to understand how Theo had been placed in Slytherin when his cunning knew no bounds and never seemed to let up.

Upon Theo’s casual arrival, Neville had spilled his goblet of pumpkin juice in his shocked state and Ginny had reached for her wand, a hex on her tongue and—it really hadn’t been pleasant. As soon as Theo had left, she had had to explain to her friends that while, yes, she and Theo and Draco were working together for their Ancient Runes project, they were also giving a go at being friends. Neville had dropped his voice and asked if she was okay before trying to politely check if she was being blackmailed. After assuring them that, no, she was very much a willing party, Ginny had stormed off in a tizzy.

The next day she had received worried letters from both Harry and Ron. Harry’s had been more…gentle, checking to see if she was okay. Ron’s, on the other hand, had started with, have you gone mental? She’d written them both back, letting them know she was of sound mind and knew what she was doing thank you very much.

Only, she really didn’t know.

Maybe she had gone mental, because, here she was, cozying up—platonically—to Theodore Nott in the Slytherin stands to watch his boyfriend play Quidditch. Mere months ago they’d been…enemies? Rivals? And now it was nearly Christmas and they were class partners and friends and it had just happened. Stranger things had to have occurred, but certainly never to her. This just about took the cake, really.

She was no closer to freeing herself from her feelings for either Theo or Draco than when she’d first set out to eradicate them weeks ago. If anything, her feelings had grown, becoming something much too large to wrap her head around the more she got to know the two of them.
Lost in her thoughts, she nearly jumped out of her skin when she glanced up and there was Draco, hovering in the air right in front of her. She wiggled to put some distance between Theo and herself, but Theo only held tight to her waist as he waved at Draco with his free hand.

Draco smiled. A wide smile, too, that showed off his perfect, straight white teeth and spoke to no hard feelings over her all but sitting on his boyfriend’s lap because apparently she’d been very effectively placed in the realm of the harmless, the friend zone, her own special circle of hell where they all bantered to the point where it sometimes felt like flirting, even though she knew better. Merlin, did she know better, but tell that to her stupid libido.

Crouching slightly over his broom, Malfoy actually winked at her and took off, zooming down the pitch. Her stomach fluttered as if she swallowed the bloody snitch.

Slytherin went on to beat Hufflepuff in what was apparently a nail-biter of a game. She hadn’t been paying attention, not when it was impossible to focus on anything but the line of Theo’s body pressed against hers and the warmth radiating from him and how stupidly edible Draco looked in his Quidditch kit. One minute she’d been thinking about the fit of Draco’s pants and then suddenly the stands were in uproar and Theo was yanking her to her feet and screaming as he tugged her into a hug that left her breathless and made her knees weak.

Draco had caught the snitch, and according to Theo that meant she needed to come to the post-game celebration. He had to be joking. Except, when she laughed, all he did was stare.

She shook her head. “In the snake pit? No, thank you.”

His blue eyes narrowed. “Why not?”

Wasn’t it obvious? “Am I even allowed?”

Theo’s brow rose.

Okay, so there were no rules prohibiting students from visiting friends in other houses and even if there were, she was Head Girl, a designation that gave her unfettered access to all the common rooms. And it wasn’t like she hadn’t broken umpteen rules in her years at Hogwarts, but, “There are lines, Theo, and a Gryffindor entering the Slytherin commons for the purpose of fun is just asking for trouble.”

“Are you scared?” he asked.

She crossed her arms. “I resent that accusation and refuse to rise to your baiting this time. It won’t work.”

He glared right back. “What about house unity? As Head Girl aren’t you supposed to be setting an example for the other students?”

“Are you scared?” she asked.

She crossed her arms. “I resent that accusation and refuse to rise to your baiting this time. It won’t work.”

He glared right back. “What about house unity? As Head Girl aren’t you supposed to be setting an example for the other students?”

“Aren’t I already?” She tugged lightly on the green scarf around her neck.

“In for a penny, in for a pound, then.” He reached down, capturing her hands in his significantly larger ones and tugged lightly. “At least pop in for a moment. You might not think so, but Draco will be sore if you don’t at least wish him congratulations. You know how he can be if he feels slighted. He’ll be a right tosser and I’ll have to put up with it.”

As if her failing to congratulate him would ruin his day, or that Theo was put out by the idea of having to soothe Draco’s ego. She’d have snorted if not for the look of absolute sincerity creasing the corners of Theo’s mouth. “Can’t you just tell him congratulations for me?”
“After he’s already seen you in the stands? A bit rude, if you ask me.”

She was running out of steam and it seemed as if Theo was only ramping up.

“We don’t bite.” He tipped his chin, bringing their faces closer. “Not unless you ask for it.”

Each time he flirted, harmlessly, a knife twisted in her tummy.

With a scoff, she shoved his shoulder weakly. “You, Theodore Nott, are terribly pushy.”

He bit his bottom lip and grinned impishly. “I prefer persuasive. Is it working?”

His thumb swept across her knuckles and—why was she saying no, again? She swallowed. “No.”

A denial that sounded weak, even to her own ears.

Theo hummed and turned her hand over, brushing his thumb this time against the middle of her palm. The sensation shot straight to her middle, causing her to shiver. Visibly. Violently.

“Please, Hermione. Come with me,” he’d dropped his voice to a wicked pitch that made everything south of her naval clench.

“Fine.” She agreed, mostly to stop him from pressing because the persuasion had begun to border on cruelty, as if he’d picked up on her weakness and decided to exploit it for all it was worth. Maybe he hadn’t meant to be cruel, but that was the effect, teasing her with something she so desperately wanted, something that she’d torn herself to pieces over wanting, and now he’d noticed and decided to press the bruise that wouldn’t quite heal.

She shouldn’t have been surprised. Slytherins were willing to do whatever it took to achieve their aims.

Only, what did Theo want, why did he want it so badly, and what did it have to do with her?

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! I have a feeling everyone’s going to be pleased with the next chapter *grins*
The Slytherin common room was as dark and chilling as she had expected, as were half the stares she received from Theo’s housemates. The warmth from Theo’s hand holding hers helped fortify her courage enough to get her over the threshold and in front of the fire where two sixth year boys were passing out cups full of something that smelled distinctly alcoholic.

Theo arched a brow in question.

She was Head Girl. She had no business drinking contraband alcohol down in the dungeons, but when in Rome…

With a put upon sigh, she nodded.

He grabbed them two cups and pressed one into her palm. “Cheers.”

She lifted the cup to her lips and tipped it back expecting the burn of firewhisky, but this was—this was good. Whatever it was didn’t burn on the way down her throat but it left her belly full of sparkling warmth that sent a tingle all the way to her toes. Without meaning to, she’d drained her entire cup and licked her lips to prolong the oak rich taste that had a hint of—what was that? Cherry?

Theo grinned at her from over the edge of his cup. “Good?”

“What is that?” she asked.

He took a long draw from his drink, his throat working as he drained it. He took her cup and set both aside on a table beside a velvet green chaise. They vanished, instantly. “Fairy wine.”

Huh. Her stomach fluttered like a thousand pixies had taken up residence inside her and—a giggle tore itself from her throat. She smacked a hand over her mouth and stared at him in question.

Theo chuckled as he spoke, “Laughter is a temporary side-effect, I swear.”

Oh Merlin, what had she done? “And what”—she laughed—“does it do then?”

He grinned. “If you drink enough, get you drunk?”

It was true that the laughter did subside after a few moments, but still, she cut herself off from anymore mysterious beverages. Not that she didn’t trust Theo, but who knew what other party favors Slytherins amused themselves with? More even, she might’ve trusted Theo but these days, she didn’t always trust herself. One drink was more than enough as was left pleasantly warm and a little loose, but clear of mind as Theo led her out of the common room and up a set of stairs.

The dungeons were laid out differently enough from Gryffindor tower that she had no idea where
they were headed. “Where are we going?”

The party was in full swing behind them, though Draco was nowhere to be seen.

Theo pulled her along, his larger hand holding hers as he guided them down a dimly lit stone hall and through a door into a room where—

Draco stood, broad back to them, a fluffy green towel hanging low on his hips. Droplets of water dripped down his alabaster skin and slipped along the curve of his spine before disappearing into where the towel was tucked just above his bum.

A small gasp slipped from her lips causing Draco to turn, the lean muscles along his flank shifting beneath his skin. She smacked a hand over her eyes but not before getting an eyeful of the fine blond hair below his naval and the indent of muscles over his hips that flared like an arrow, pointing down to what his towel concealed.

Theo had the audacity to chuckle and continue tugging on her hand to pull her further into the room as if Draco wasn’t standing half naked several feet away.

“Theo.” She pulled against his grip. Even though she couldn’t see Draco, she said, “Sorry, Malfoy. I didn’t mean to—”

Catch you nearly starkers? Merlin and Morgana, talk about a disaster.

The sound of his towel hitting the floor made her jump. Her whole body burned like it had been licked by Fiendfyre as cloth rustled somewhere nearby.

“I’m decent.”

She twitched. Malfoy was standing right in front of her, much closer than she could’ve anticipated, close enough that the smell of his shampoo—something like rosemary—tickled her nose.

He most certainly was not decent.

Sure he was dressed, but the long-sleeved white shirt he wore clung to his still damp chest and his green flannel pants rode low on his hips, low enough that if he lifted his arms she’d probably catch another peek at the trail of fair blond hair that—

She tore her eyes away from his—Gods, she’d been staring at his crotch. She glanced around the room. Yes, that was safe. Except Theo was stretched out atop a larger than standard size bed looking like the subject of some Raphaelian painting, all dimpled cheeks and blue eyes and full lips. A veritable devil in an angel’s skin.

“Congratulations,” she forced the words. “That was a good match.”

Malfoy chuckled. “Were you even paying attention?”

And that meant what exactly?

He backed up and dropped down atop the bed Theo was lounging on. The mattress dipped, sending Theo bouncing slightly. “You usually bring books to Quidditch matches, don’t you?”

Oh.

“No, I was watching.”
“Well, thanks, Granger.” Malfoy ran his fingers through his hair, lifting the damp strands. They fell against his forehead making him look—what had Parvarti and Lavender called it? *Freshly fucked?* Right, that. “I appreciate it.”

She nodded, shifting on her feet. She pivoted, glancing around the room where various Quidditch posters hung, not unlike in the boy’s dorm in Gryffindor tower.

Why had Theo brought her here and why were they still in here and not out in the common room?

“Green’s a good color on you,” Malfoy said, sounding sincere. When she turned, he actually looked a bit sheepish, like he realized he’d delivered a compliment free of snark.

Ignoring the hidden, alternate meaning of that statement—because there was no way *jealousy* was a good look on her even if she’d been experiencing it all too often—she fingered the scarf around her neck that had held on to its scent, clove and smoke and shrugged. “Thanks, it’s Theo’s.”

“You can sit, you know,” he said.

Where? His bed? She took a tentative step toward him and then another and another until she rested against the edge of his mattress with a healthy distance between them.

“Refreshments?” Theo rolled off the bed and strolled to the door.

She shook her head while Draco nodded, and then—

Then it was just the two of them.

Alone.

In his dorm room.

On top of his bed, the bed he slept in and probably shagged in, shagged Theo in.

Merlin help her.

“I meant it,” Draco said, not looking at her, but at the door. “Theo will take your arm if you offer him a hand.”

For the first time, that sounded like an actual warning.

Were they talking about the game, the after party, or being here in his room? No matter, it was true. For all her hemming and hawing, had she *really* not wanted to come, no one would’ve been able to make her do a thing.

She licked her lips and chose her words carefully. “He can be pushy, yes, but I wouldn’t have come had I not wanted to.”

Draco turned, their knees knocking. He dropped his hand to the mattress beside hers, close enough to feel the phantom touch of his pinky. “Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why did you come?” He shook his head. “You hate Quidditch and I have a feeling you hate parties.”
“I don’t hate parties,” she argued, mostly so she wouldn’t have to admit that she’d come for him.

Though, she really didn’t hate parties. For all she valued her studies and had picked up the reputation of preferring to have her nose in a book than do much else, gatherings amongst friends where she could let her hair down and laugh and sip butter beer and revel in the lightness of it all were wonderful. She wasn’t even opposed to an actual drink now and then, or even getting a little warm and tipsy, but she found alcohol made most people sloppy and few knew their limits. If they weren’t lucky enough to get the giggles, they got teary, or worse—angry. Personally, she liked being in control of her thoughts, her body, of sound mind, sometimes too much so to the extent where she couldn’t let go, couldn’t unwind on the rare occasions when she wanted to.

She couldn’t very well explain, not properly, that a Slytherin party was a different beast than the gatherings she was used to. Even with Theo and Draco there, she’d be looking over her shoulder constantly, and when she wasn’t she’d be over-thinking everything. It would be impossible to relax, especially since she wouldn’t be drinking much.

Draco shrugged. “I do. Which is why I have zero intention of leaving this room for the rest of the evening.”

So that was why they were here, why Theo had brought her to this room. If Draco wouldn’t go to the celebration, it seemed Theo was determined to bring it to him. A good boyfriend, indeed.

“What do you usually do after a match?” she asked.

Draco tilted his head in consideration. “Eat if I’m hungry, sleep if I’m tired, sha—”

He broke off, cheeks pinking.

“Yes?” she prodded.

“Never mind.” He shook his head and stood. “It’s good you’re here, actually. I have something for you.”

She sat up a little straighter. “Oh?”

He went to his nightstand and opened the top drawer. “It’s just a little something we had in the library.”

“He laughed. “Merlin, no.”

“And what’s that supposed to suggest?” she teased. “Merlin, no.”

Finding whatever it was he looking for, Draco returned to the bed beside her.

“He handed her a thick volume in pristine condition, the gold-gilded font crisp and—”

She nearly dropped it.

“Is this—” She shook her head. No. “This is not a first edition of Hogwarts: A History.”

“It is, actually,” he said, lips twitching. “And it’s yours if you’d like it.”

“If I’d like it?” She laughed, breathless. She’d only ever been able to find a third edition, but this…
this was priceless. Merlin, she couldn’t possibly take it. “Malfoy, this is…this is too much. I can’t take this. This is—”

Her favorite book. Her throat was thick and her nose was stuffy and—no, she was not going to cry over this, damn it.

“It’s been gathering dust in the Malfoy library for Merlin only knows how long. The Ministry’s raided our stacks twice already and it’s likely only a matter of time before they take this, too. Reparations. I’d rather you have it. I want you to have it. Happy early Christmas.”

He reached down, covering one of her hands with his tentatively.

Theo was open with his touches, had been ever since she’d agreed to being friends. He had no issue with sweeping away eyelashes, touching her arm to get her attention, grabbing her hand to tug her along, hugging her even. Draco, on the other hand, had remained reserved. He’d only recently started to open up, to laugh freely and speak without caution, but physically he’d remained inhibited save for the times they’d swap books and their fingers would brush, without fail causing her cheeks to flame. So this, the way he touched her with purpose set her nerves on edge, her stomach clenching at the newness of the gesture that with anyone else would’ve been casual, but with him felt strangely intimate.

“I feel like I need to give you something in return,” she whispered, fingers of her right hand tracing the script on the book’s cover. Something more than the package of Muggle caramel apple pops she’d introduced him to, the ones he was now ridiculously fond of. She’d bought him a huge bag, but her gift paled in comparison to his staggering show of thoughtfulness.

“There is something, I suppose.”

She tore her eyes away and met his. He was staring at her, gray eyes solemn.

“Anything,” she breathed. And as dangerous as that might’ve been, foolish even, she meant it down to the marrow of her bones. All he had to do was ask and she’d give him whatever it was he wanted.

He dropped back to the bed, a bit closer than before and still holding her hand. His eyes dropped to her mouth and her heart pounded.

Clutching the priceless, precious gift, Hermione held her breath as the distance between their faces shrunk, the pull between them magnetic, hypnotic. She could all but taste the apple he must’ve eaten after the game, the sweet scent of it clinging to his warm breath. It fanned against her face, her lips, lips she parted in anticipation, dizzy with wanting and—

“I come bearing libations for—”

She lurched from the bed, knocking the book off her lap onto the mattress, standing as if she hadn’t been about to…what in Merlin’s name had she been about to do? Ruin everything, that’s what.

As was, she could scarcely look Theo in the eye as he stood in the doorway, eyes wide and rounded like he couldn’t believe what he was seeing.

She couldn’t believe it, either.

This was wrong, so unbelievably wrong. Bad, ethically terrible, illogical, all around a bollocks idea and Gods, what happened to her being of sound mind? She wasn’t drunk, not at all, but she certainly hadn’t been thinking.
This was the opposite of what she’d meant to do and it wasn’t who she was no matter how terribly she ached to press her mouth to Malfoy’s and taste him. She didn’t go around kissing her friends, kissing her very taken friends, the friends who happened to be taken by another friend. No, she wasn’t some boyfriend stealing _slag_.

Oh Gods. She was, or at least an _attempted_ boyfriend stealing slag which might’ve been even worse. She was going to be _sick_.

“I should go.”

Stomach churning and eyes stinging, Hermione avoided both their gazes as she all but sprinted from the room.

“Hermione!”

Was that Theo or Draco? Her ears were ringing and the sound of the party barely registered as she hauled arse through the common room and out the portrait door into the corridor.

Footsteps thundered behind her but she didn’t slow, not until—

Dead end. Somehow, in her distracted state, she’d made a wrong turn, winding up in front of a stone wall with nowhere else to run. She clenched her eyes shut and several hot tears slipped out, wetting her cheeks.

Those footsteps caught up to her, accompanied by the sound of heavy breathing. “Salazar’s rod, Hermione, I wasn’t bloody built for this.”

_Theo._

She didn’t turn. It was cowardly of her, so weak, but she couldn’t look him in the eye. He could yell—_should_ yell—and tell her what an awful person she was, but she couldn’t look at him while he did it.

Inside her chest, her heart beat raced, speeding even faster as he came nearer, no longer running but taking measured steps, his footfalls quiet but not quite silent against the stone.

“Hermione.”

She winced.

“Look at me.”

She shook her head. God, even her nose was running.

A hand closed around her right shoulder. She skittered forward, out of reach, pressing her fingertips against the stone in front of her.

“Hermione, _look at me._” His tone brokered no room for argument. It was an order, not a request, one she couldn’t refuse.

The trumpeting sound of the execution march played inside her head as she turned, eyes glued to the floor. Theo was right there, the toes of his boots bumping her flats, boxing her in, her back now against the wall.

“I’m _sorry, _” her voice broke. “I didn’t mean to—”
“Stop it.” His voice was so harsh she flinched. “Don’t lie.”

Scraping together what little courage she had, she lifted her head and—Merlin, his nostrils were flared, his jaw as hard as granite as he slid it forward, highlighting the straining tendons in his neck.

“I’m not—”

“Don’t.”

She shook her head, more tears escaping and blurring her vision. She drew in a messy breath that turned into a hiccup. “What do you want me to say?”

Theo’s eye’s softened, just a little, as he reached out. She held still, would not flinch, as he swept his thumb beneath her eye, wiping away her tears just like he had swept aside her eyelash. “I want the truth.”

Wasn’t it obvious? Merlin, was this to be her punishment? Confessing her sins? Repenting?

Another hiccup slipped from her lips. She owed him the truth, deserved to watch his blue eyes grow cold as she told him just how terrible she was. Maybe then, and only then, she’d get rid of these feelings. Bad luck that she’d have to ruin her friendship to accomplish her task. “I’m an awful person.”


She shut her eyes and nodded.

Fingers tilted her chin up, holding until she fluttered her eyes open.

He was looking at her with a tender look of understanding in his eyes that she didn’t deserve.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have—”

“Run.”

She blinked.

“You shouldn’t have run away,” he said, fingers brushing the line of her jaw. “For one, I wasn’t meant for sprinting and I think you left him hanging.”

Her jaw dropped. Was he—a fresh wave of tears spilled out, running down her cheeks. She clenched her back teeth until her molars creaked. Anger at herself and frustration at him fueled her confession. “This isn’t funny, Theo. I nearly kissed your boyfriend. I wanted to kiss him. I’ve wanted to kiss him for—for years and tonight I nearly did. I’m such a…such a slag.”

His left hand slammed against the wall beside her head, his right yanking her chin. She flinched at the suddenness of it, at the way his eyes had morphed into blue flames. Her breath quickened, pulse racing. Theo had never appeared so capable of crossing that line between danger and destruction. “Don’t you dare, Hermione. Don’t you dare call yourself that. Don’t even think it.”

Her breath whistled through her lips, chest heaving.

“You’re not,” he repeated. “You need to get that through your brilliant skull, do you understand? You’re not a slag and I’m not angry.”

She shook her head, hair sticking to her tear stained cheeks. “You should be. You should hate me.”
“For wanting Draco?”

She scoffed through her tears. “No, Theo, for hating Quidditch. Yes, for wanting Draco.”

And you.

“Let me let you in on a little secret.” The hand gripping her jaw shifted, his thumb sweeping against the swell of her trembling lower lip. He dropped his head, his lips brushing the shell of her ear. Despite herself, she shivered. “He wants you, too.”

Her heart skipped several beats.

“What?” she croaked.

That couldn’t be right. That wasn’t what he said.


But plenty for confusion.

“That’s—no.” She shook her head. “Draco and you are—”

He pulled away, looking her in the eye, and arched a brow. “Yes. And?”

And so none of this was making any sense. Draco was with Theo, happy with Theo. Why would he want her and why wasn’t Theo angry?

“I’m confused,” she whispered, desperation overriding the shame of not understanding. Anything louder than that volume and her voice would’ve broken, again.

Eyes locked, Theo leaned closer until their noses brushed, once, twice—

His lips pressed against hers, stealing what remained of her breath. It was a good thing she was pressed snug between the wall and his body or else she might’ve crumbled at the sweep of his tongue against the seam of her mouth, demanding entry, entry she wasn’t entirely sure she meant to grant or if it was just a gasp of shock that let him in, let him taste the blunts edges of her teeth.

He tasted like fairy wine and cloves and smoke and sin and if nearly kissing Draco had been a bad idea, actually kissing Theo was worse because it felt so impossibly right.

Over before she could even wrap her head around the fact that holy hell, Theo was snogging her, he pulled himself away, fingers grazing her jaw before he dropped his hand and stepped back, leaving enough room for the chill of the corridor to invade.

“Brightest witch of our age, Hermione,” he said, turning, looking over his shoulder. “Figure it out.”
All break, her lips burned with the ghost of Theo’s kiss, but her chest burned worse.

Shame? Check.

Being an awful friend? Well, she certainly felt like a terrible friend no matter what Theo had said. So, check there, too.

Nothing would ever happen? Er…

She’d almost kissed Draco. Theo had kissed her. Something had happened, something big and altering and it didn’t make sense. Worse, it wasn’t something she could find the answer to in a book or even discuss with her friends as they caught up on the last few months, all of them spending the holidays at the Burrow. No, Ron and Harry and Ginny were suspicious enough of her new friendship with Draco and Theo that she wasn’t about to tell them about this—whatever this was. She was one hundred percent on her own on this one.

Brightest witch of her age, her arse.

***

The end of Christmas break and the return to Hogwarts came much too soon. Before she knew it, she was back in the castle, treading the familiar path to the library.

Theo had stopped by her table at lunch, asking if they were still on to meet after dinner, per usual for their group project. He’d been rather nonchalant, one thumb tucked casually in his pocket as he stood over her shoulder. Nothing about his countenance or his behavior had hinted at what had happened before the holidays. The look in his eyes might’ve told a different story, but she’d carefully avoided eye contact, staring instead at his ear as she nodded an affirmative because despite her reluctance, she had no excuse to skip out on their scheduled sessions, the first of the term no less.

So how was she to play this? Casual, like nothing had happened? No, she was a terrible actress and a worse liar so that was out. Apologizing again would probably not go over well, considering how Theo had reacted in the corridor.
She took a deep breath and crossed over the threshold into the library. She’d play it by ear and let them take the reins. She’d be quiet and focus on their project and maybe one day they would forget this whole thing had ever happened and they could go back to how things had been before she’d messed everything up. Maybe not a perfect plan, but it was an imperfect situation she’d landed herself in. It would have to do.

Theo and Draco were already at the table, which figured. She was a bit late, having paced outside the library for several moments. At the sound of her approach, they looked up.


Draco simply nodded at her before going back to whatever it was he was reading. Nodded at her rather tersely, actually, and he hadn’t looked her in the eye. Her heart sank into her stomach.

All along she’d been anticipating Theo’s ire, his displeasure at having caught her and Draco about to kiss. This, Draco barely being able to look at her, had not been something she’d accounted for. It wasn’t something she could stomach, not when they’d only just put the past behind them. Things between them had been good and now…

She needed a moment.

She dropped her bag into her chair to show that she wasn’t running off, not permanently at least. “I’ll be right back.”

Though she didn’t run, she did hurry, unwilling to be caught by someone looking to chat. She headed straight for the ladies’ room and upon entering, made a beeline for the sink where she ran the water as cold as she could and let it run over her wrists, cooling her down.

New plan. She’d go back into the library, steel herself, make Draco look her in the eye, and tell him she was sorry. Clearly Theo was wrong and didn’t speak for Draco’s wishes because he hadn’t looked so uncomfortable since that first night in the library when they’d cleared the air.

Hermione shut off the water, dried her hands, and left the bathroom.

She should’ve guessed it, really.

Standing just outside, shoulders against the stone wall and his legs crossed at the ankles, was Theo. At least she hadn’t plowed into him this time.

He smiled, not a grin, nowhere close, but it was something. “We’ve really got to stop meeting like this.”

She rolled her eyes up to the ceiling. “Maybe you should stop following me to the loo.”

Theo kicked off the wall and crossed the hall, stopping in front of her at a reasonable, respectful distance. He licked his bottom lip and dropped his voice to a conspiratorial pitch. “Did you figure it out? You had two weeks.”

It didn’t take being a genius or the brightest witch of their age to know what he meant. She crossed her arms and stared beyond him where Sidley Smirk Platter was dozing in his portrait. “No. I didn’t, but I don’t think I care to. Malfoy will hardly look me in the eye.”

Not that she could blame him. She was having trouble looking at herself in the mirror.

“You really don’t get it, do you?” He muttered more to himself than her. “Draco’s got his knickers
in a twist because he’s cross with me. That and he’s envious.”

*What?* Her eyes flew to his. “Of me?”

Theo cackled. “No, Hermione. Of *me*.”

The words made sense strung together, but were entirely illogical. “*Why?*”

“Because”—his smile grew, would’ve almost looked patronizing had the sparkle in his eyes been so amused—“I kissed you, and he didn’t.”

“You told him?” Her voice went squeaky.

He stared at her like she was the one acting absurd. “Of course I did. Draco and I don’t keep secrets from one another.”

She pinched her eyes shut. Of course they didn’t and they shouldn’t. At least she hadn’t messed that up between them.

“We tell each other everything. Always have,” he continued. “And the first time Draco told me he wanted you was in fourth year. And even if he hadn’t? I see the way he looks at you, and it’s the same way you look at him. Quit acting like I’m supposed to be surprised when I’m anything but. Frankly, it’s insulting.”

Her eyes snapped open, widening until she could feel her lashes brush the skin beneath her brows. “*What?*”

Theo glanced down at his boots, hands clenching into fists, opening and closing rhythmically at his sides. “None of this—this shouldn’t be my story to tell. It’s not my place, but if I don’t say something, nothing’s ever going to change. Draco will go back to pining in secret and you’ll—let me guess, go back to feeling guilty over something you don’t understand the half of?”

She crossed her arms, somehow chastened and indignant all at once.

“Draco likes you, Hermione. And if you gave him a chance and enough time, he’ll more than likely fall in love with you.”

Inside her chest, her heart lurched, battering itself against her sternum as if it could escape.

“But what about…” She wet her lips. “What about you? You and he are—“

“Together?” He nodded. “I love Draco, he loves me, and I’m not giving him up. I only want what’s best for him.”

“Which is your way of saying what?”

He smiled, softer this time, tender. “I’m not calling you the answer, but you’re certainly part of the equation.”

He was still being rather cryptic, but at least this time they were getting somewhere. He was giving answers she could work with.

“So what, you’re okay with me wanting to—wanting him? Your boyfriend? It doesn’t make you jealous?”

Theo shut his eyes and released a rattling breath through his lips. “Short answer, yes I’m okay with
“Long answer”—he opened his eyes and pinned her with a hot stare—“I’m more than okay with it.”

“What about”—she gestured between them with a finger—“us? You kissed me. Was that just to make Draco upset, give him a little nudge?”

“I kissed you because I’ve been aching to find out what you taste like since sixth year,” he confessed. Her pounding heart did a somersault. “And he’s not upset, he’s envious. There’s a difference. He wants what I got to have, but it doesn’t mean he doesn’t want me to have it, too.”

If she opened her mouth to say something, there was a chance her heart would leap out, physiologically impossible as it was.

Theo tugged on his earlobe and added, “For being only children, Draco and I are quite comfortable with sharing.”

That snapped her out of it, her blood running cold. “So that’s what this is about? You want to share a witch.”

Had they done this before? Was she not the first? Or if she was, was the whole thing some novel idea, an experience to check off some kinky bucket list? She refused to be some sort of—of sexual prop.

“Merlin, no,” he said, actually sounding affronted at the suggestion. “This is very much about you specifically. If it was just about sharing a witch, don’t you think we could’ve picked someone—I mean this with the upmost affection—less complicated? Someone without our unsavory history?”

That was oddly reassuring.

“But it is about…”She glanced around to make certain they were alone because this was difficult enough to talk about with just him, let alone in front of eavesdroppers. She lowered her voice for good measure. “Sex?”

What else could he possibly mean by sharing?

She held still as Theo reached out, tucking a wild curl behind her ear. His fingers lingered, grazing the shell of her ear, the lobe, before he trailed the back of his knuckles along her neck. “Would you like the polite answer or the impolite one?”

Her pulse tripped. “The honest one.”

“Of course you do.” His teeth scraped against his lip, drawing the flesh tight briefly. The move left his mouth red and distractingly kissable. “Yes, Draco wants you. He wants to bury his face between your thighs and hear you sing. He wants to make love to you, rock into your perfect body until you quiver and sigh and lights burst behind your lids.”

Merlin.

She summoned her courage from the indelible well that came with being a Gryffindor, apparently. “And you?”

Theo’s fingers were still grazing her neck, her throat, the skin behind her ear. Each fleeting brush of his fingertips sent flickers of pleasure skittering across her skin. “Honestly?”

She swallowed and he had to have felt it against his fingers, the bobbing of her throat. She nodded.
His smirk made her insides riot. “I want to bend you over a desk and fuck you hoarse, Hermione. I want to make your knees give out and hear you scream my name as I pound into you until you can’t take any more of it. I want to feel that tight little cunt of yours quiver and clench while you come all over my cock again, and again, and again.”

Panting, she was panting, her chest rising and falling as Theo whispered the filthiest words she’d ever heard, delivered them like promises while stroking her throat. Her knickers weren’t just soaked. They were ruined.

“But before you go getting the wrong idea”—He dropped his hand and took a step back. She whimpered at the loss of his touch—“It’s not only about sex. You’re not some notch on a bedpost for either of us. If you want this, you’d best believe it will be all or nothing.”

Words. She was supposed to form words with her mouth, not just stand there gaping at him like a fish. “Meaning what exactly?”

Theo dipped his chin so he could stare her directly in the eyes. “Meaning Draco isn’t looking for a quick shag, and neither am I. It wouldn’t be enough for either of us, not for what we want and pretending otherwise would not only do us all a grave disservice, but also complicate a situation that I’m sure you can understand deserves to be handled with care. We like you. We want to spend time with you. Draco wants to play-fight with you and gift you with priceless books and I want to —” For the first time, he blushed, his cheeks honest to Merlin turning an alluring shade of pink that made his skin glow in the dim light of the corridor. “I’m finding myself rather fond of holding your hand.”

How was it possible for certain parts of her to be so wet and yet her mouth was parched? She licked her lips. “So there’d be you and Draco, and Draco and me, and you and me, so we’d be…”

“Come on, Hermione,” he joked. “You’re bright. Relationships don’t have to be just two people.”

“Of course.”

She’d heard of faithful non-monogamy or polygamy and polyamory and—she read, okay? But she’d never witnessed such a relationship in real life and she’d certainly never expected to find herself suddenly presented with the option of being in one.

The option. Was that what she wanted? The both of them? Yes, but there was a difference between wanting and having and if the wanting had been complicated? Theo was right; the situation required a degree of care she hadn’t ever stopped to consider because she’d barely let herself fantasize about it, let alone consider the logistics. Unprepared was putting it lightly.

His expression sobered. “But they can be. When I say all or nothing, I don’t mean you have to want both of us. You don’t have to do anything. So if you just want Draco—”

“I want you,” she blurted. “I—I want you, too. I just didn’t think…”

He lifted a brow. “Didn’t think we wanted you? Didn’t think you could have this?”

She shrugged. “Can you blame me?”

“No, which is why I’m saying something, why I chased after you in the hall. I’m tired of waiting for whatever right moment Draco was waiting for and that’s why he’s cross with me, because I’ve apparently rushed his rather nebulous plan. We’d probably all be well settled into careers and pushing twenty-five by the time he eased into it. Consider it a grand gesture on my part that I’ve risked my boyfriend’s wrath to set this to rights.”
“Wrath?” she asked, eyes widening. The last thing she wanted was to drive a wedge between them, even unintentionally.

Theo’s lips twisted in a pitiful pout. “He hardly touched me all break, Hermione.”

“Seriously,” she muttered, not sure if she wanted to laugh or whimper at how put out he sounded at not being touched—shagged?—for two weeks when she’d been making do all by herself for much longer.

“Like I said, I’ve made quite the sacrifice, so pardon my lack of subtlety, but I didn’t want to risk my message being misunderstood. This is me saying you can have what you want.” His tone made it sound like a promise. “And believe me when I say that Draco and I are both more than ready to show you just how badly we want you. All of you. If you’ll let us. I can guarantee you Draco will swiftly remove his head from his arse once he realizes we’re all on the same page.”

Show you just how badly we want you. All of you. Her knees knocked together, thighs clenching.

Theo grinned wickedly and stepped closer, erasing the distance he’d put between them. He dropped his hand, slipping it inside the opening of her robe, and curled it around her hip. Warmth soaked through her skirt from his palm. “So I’m going to ask you, Hermione, do you want that? This?”

She’d barely dipped her chin in a nod before Theo was backing her up and pressing her against the wall, his mouth on hers, his teeth tugging at her bottom lip until she groaned. His front was pressed to hers, his hips pinning her in place, and she ached, nipples pebbling against the cotton of her bra.

Too soon, Theo drew back and she chased his mouth, a needy little groan slipping from her lips when she couldn’t reach. He grinned and leaned back in, pecking her briefly but giving her no more. Unfortunately.

“We need to get you back to the library.” He tangled the fingers of his left hand with her right and pulled her down the hall.

“Get me back? What about you?” she asked, breathless from being dragged down the corridor at a pace much too quick for the length of her legs.

Theo pulled to a stop in front of the library’s doors, but didn’t let go of her. His thumb swept an arc against the thin, fragile skin of her wrist causing her to shiver lightly. “You need to talk about this. Just the two of you and without my intervention or interruption. For once.”

She pursed her lips and lifted a brow. “Just how long have you been plotting this, Theodore?”

He hissed through his teeth before smirking. “Theodore? Am I in trouble, Miss Granger?”

She swatted his arm and bit the inside of her cheek to keep from laughing.

“You make it sound nefarious when my intentions were pure.” He paused, lips quirking higher. “Okay, not pure, but harmless.”

She waited.

“IT was rather fortuitous that you sat beside me in class that day, but neither Draco nor I dreamt of this being a real possibility, certainly not until after you forgave him and then still, neither of us gave much credence to the idea. Draco wasn’t convinced you wanted him in any tangible way until after his Quidditch match. I, on the other hand, figured it out sooner. Hence my insistence. Though I don’t think either of us was counting on you nearly kissing him. Made my life easier, so thank
you, not that I wouldn’t have figured out some way to bridge the gap eventually.”

“I knew you were up to something with that whole drain the wound bit.”

He shook his head. “In part, maybe. But I really did want you to forgive him regardless. He needed that.”

They both had.

Theo squeezed her hand once before letting her go with a tilt of his head and a smile that did little to quell her nerves.

***

Draco was sitting where she’d left him, watching the path from the door. His face brightened at her approach before he tore his eyes away, as if for a brief moment he’d forgotten himself, forgotten that he wasn’t supposed to be eager, wasn’t supposed to let on that he wanted her all because he had no idea she wanted him, too.

There was nothing worse than that bruising pang, wanting something, someone, so badly and believing you couldn’t have it, save for maybe the guilt that accompanied that desire. Little did he know she was all too familiar with that pain and that neither of them needed to know it any longer.

For just a moment, she let herself look at him, at the brilliant shade of his blond hair and how it fell across his forehead, over his brow. The sharp juts of his cheek bones and the solid line of his jaw. His patrician nose and the way his full lips balanced his features, softened them. How the light reflected off his pale lashes, giving his gray eyes a haloed glow.

He was beautiful and she didn’t have to pretend she didn’t want him, not anymore. She could—her breath caught in her throat—she could have him, could reach out and touch him and tell him, show him that it wasn’t just him, or him and Theo that felt this way.

She didn’t want to wait.

Yes, they needed to talk and they would. But they didn’t have the greatest track record of conversations going perfectly as intended. So first…

Instead of taking her seat, she rounded the table to his side, stepped closer until her trembling knees brushed his thigh. He was holding himself still, so still he was nearly shaking, his muscles all but quivering, a tense string just waiting to be plucked.

She licked her lips. “Draco.”

He glanced up at her through his lashes and the look in his eyes stole her breath, snatched it from her lungs entirely. Hope. Want. A dash of fear, fear she had the power to snuff out.

Moving slowly with the sort of caution one might use when approaching something wild and fierce, she lifted her hand to his face and cupped his jaw, stroked her thumb over its hinge. She leaned in, breathed in the scent of his aftershave and his skin, and soaked up the way he trembled under her touch like even this, the anticipation, was a dream come true, or maybe too good to be true.

Her lips landed softly, gently, pressing against the pillowed swells of his lips before holding, savoring, brushing slightly, waiting, waiting, waiting—
Draco gasped against her mouth like a drowning man coming up for air. His hand closed around the wrist of the hand holding his face, his other arm swinging around her body and clutching her to him, bringing her down atop his lap where she landed, knees splayed on either side of his well-muscles thighs.

Fevered, the kiss was fevered, moving so quickly from slow to fast that her head spun. His tongue swept against the seam of her lips and she opened, mewling when he stroked the tip of her tongue with his, tasting. Draco groaned and his hands dropped to her hips holding her still because—oh Merlin, she’d been rocking against him, wantonly grinding her core into his—oh.

He was hard beneath her, his cock pressing against her thigh. She froze, breaking the kiss.

His face was flushed and his eyes bright as he stared. His fingers dug into her hips as if he wasn’t sure if she might flee.

“You called me Draco,” he whispered.

She licked her lips and he tracked the move with his eyes. “It’s your name, is it not?”

“You’ve never called me Draco before,” he said. “It was always Malfoy.”

“I figured it was time. Past due, really.” Silly to still be calling him by his surname when her lips already knew the taste and shape of his given name so well. It had been tumbling from her lips for months, whispered and whimpered whenever she made herself come.

His Adam’s apple bobbed, his lids falling to half-mast as if he was thinking about it, too. “I like it. My name on your tongue.”

Oh, she really needed to get off his lap if she wanted to keep her head on straight during this conversation. Now that she’d realized he was hard against her, it was difficult to think of anything else.

Reluctantly, she placed her hands on his shoulders and lifted up, swinging her leg over until she was standing beside him. She tugged the chair that had been Theo’s close enough that their legs touched when she dropped down against the hard wood. “So.”

He waited, silvery eyes darting over her face.

“You like me.”

He snorted. Was it possible to snort with class? Somehow he achieved it, the sound less crass and far more dignified than a puff of air through the nose had any right to be. “Whatever could’ve given you that impression?”

She huffed. “I mean, you like me. You have”—she swallowed—“feelings for me.”

He shut his eyes. His lids were slightly purple, discolored as if he hadn’t gotten a good night’s sleep in ages. Then again, neither had she. “How much did Theo tell you?”

The last thing she wanted was to get Theo in more trouble, but he had said there were no secrets, so why start with them now? “Well, he said you’ve like me since fourth year and—”


Wow. Okay, then.
She bit her lip, trying not to smile and doing a rather lackluster job of it. “I punched you in the face third year.”

He nodded, the curve of his lips a little wry. “You broke my nose. It was a good hit and I was strangely smitten. I didn’t know it at the time, it took the summer to figure it out. Suffice it to say, I wasn’t happy about fancying you, but my feelings…persisted. Not that you should take that as permission to do it again. I’d prefer we keep our sparring verbal.”

Okay, it was no use. The thought of Draco, who at the time had been an absolute prat, pining after her, after she’d given him a showing that she could whip his arse with or without magic was almost too much. And then to hear him confirm that he enjoyed arguing with her as much as she did him? She grinned. “That’s rather enlightening.”

He rolled his eyes. “Go on. What else did Theo say when he decided to run his mouth?”

She’d know him long enough to recognize his blustery irritation for what it was; Draco was embarrassed. Quickly clearing her throat to keep from laughing, she picked something that might grant Draco a little reprieve, taking the heat off him and his confessions. “He told me he also fancies me.”

“He does.” He glanced at her askance. “And what do you think about that?”

Heat crept up her jaw. “He told me that he told you we kissed.”

Draco nodded. “He did.”

“We did. Again, before I came back in here. So, yes, I—I—”

There was something she hadn’t told Theo, not because she hadn’t wanted to, but mostly because she was saving this confession for Draco. He could tell Theo, or she could later, but he deserved to know first, to hear it directly from her.

“I lied.”

The space between his brows creased.

She took a deep breath, steeling herself to speak aloud this monumental confession for the first time, words she’d never uttered to a single soul, a confession she’d been ready to take to the grave. “That day in potions, sixth year, with the amortentia. I didn’t smell new parchment and grass and toothpaste.”

Draco took a tremulous breath in through his nose, his shoulders rising and falling. “No?”

“No.” She shook her head. “I was actually quite confused, because I understood some of it, but, well, I smelled old parchment and apples”—She stole a peek and he was looking at her as if she hung the moon. Yes, saving this confession for him had been worth it—“but I also smelled, well, I smelled cloves.”

“Really?” He tilted his head to the side.

She nodded. “I was attracted to you by then, and Theo, even if I couldn’t place the smell at the time. I think part of me didn’t want to place it, because I couldn’t wrap my brain around wanting either of you, let alone both of you. I suppose, without knowing it, I must’ve picked up the smell on him in passing. Subconscious desires and all. The potion doesn’t lie.”
Draco’s lips twitched. “Sixth year, then. Both of us.”

“Probably before then, but I don’t know. It’s easier to mark it with the day in potions.”

Easier so she didn’t have to play back through every single moment and glance to untangle her knotted up memories in search of the precise moment when her anger had collided with sympathy, with arousal, with understanding in a perfect storm of feelings, feelings that were ugly and beautiful and uncomfortable and more than she’d ever wanted, but now that she wouldn’t trade for the world because they brought her here to a time and place where Draco and Theo wanted her, too.

He nodded.

“He also said”—Merlin, her face was on fire from the severity of her flush—“that you’re in accord regarding, erm, the both of you wanting—and me wanting you and…” Gods, why was this so difficult? “You’re in accord regarding sharing?”

Draco didn’t seem jealous or put out—at Theo wanting her or her wanting the both of them—but she needed to make absolutely certain because Theo was right. This whole situation required care and honesty and communication, no matter how unpracticed they might be at it at first. Otherwise this could blow up in all their faces and she refused to have that on her conscious.

He laughed, seemingly unbothered. “Yes. We’re in accord, Granger.”

“Are you honestly making fun of me?” Heat crept up her neck and jaw, whether from embarrassment or irritation, she wasn’t sure.

He shook his head. “I’m asking you to relax.”

She dropped her shoulders. They’d nearly been up by her ears. “Oh. Sorry, this is—”

“New?” he offered, eyes brimming with what appeared to be affection.

She nodded.

He reached out, grabbing her hand from the table, and lowered it, holding it atop his knee. “I don’t want to make you uncomfortable.”

“I’m not.” Her face heated even further. “It’s just…foreign territory. For me. In more ways than one.”

Even if the desire had been there for years, and even if this between them had been building for months, the fact that her feelings were requited was such a fresh realization that her head was spinning.

He was playing with her fingers, studiously avoiding her eyes. “I hope Theo told you, this isn’t about sex. Not to me, not to either of us.”

Right. That topic, the one that had made her flush with neon out in the corridor as Theo told her exactly what they wanted to do with her. “He said something to that effect. That it’s not just about that.”

“It doesn’t have to be about that at all, not if you don’t want—”

“I want it to,” she said. “I mean, not just about that. But I want that.”

Merlin, she probably resembled a tomato but what was he thinking? Yes, she might’ve earned
herself a reputation as a bookworm, but she was still very much a woman with needs, needs that she’d *satisfactorily* managed on her own. But now, she was a woman suddenly in a relationship, or at least on the precipice of one, with not one, but two men she’d fancied for years. If Draco thought she’d be content to have a nice, chaste relationship where the three of them flirted over ancient texts and made eyes at each other only to then go their separate ways, he and Theo to shag to their hearts’ content and her to bed up in the tower all by herself, he was sorely mistaken.

Draco nodded. “It doesn’t need to be about that until you’re ready then.”

He wasn’t getting it. Gods. Another fresh realization? Draco Malfoy was apparently a *gentleman* and a blind one at that.

Channeling, well, Theo to honest, she decided to be frank. “Draco, the fact that I haven’t had sex has nothing to do with not being ready or not wanting to and everything to do with the fact that, until today, I couldn’t have sex with whom I wanted.”

His grip around her fingers tightened. “Oh.”

“Yes. *Oh.*” She froze. “Unless you aren’t interested in—”

“No.” He all but strangled her hand for how tightly he squeezed. His silver eyes were wide, his cheeks flushed pink. “I am.”

A giddiness she hadn’t felt in ages filled her stomach, harkening back to when times were easy. *Easier,* at least. “All right.”

Relaxing his grip, Draco tangled their fingers together. His hand dwarfed hers entirely. “For all I can now appreciate Theo’s rather dogged insistence, none of this is unfolding quite the way I had planned.”

“And what, pray tell, did you have planned?” For all she was teasing, she was genuinely curious.

“I had planned on taking more time to focus on our friendship, for starters, and then I’d “—Draco rolled his lips together, searching for the right word—“ease you into the idea *more.*”

“Oh, yes, and nearly kissing me on your bed fit into your strategy, how exactly?”

The corner of his mouth pulled up into a smirk. “Need I remind you that *you* nearly kissed *me,* Granger? I was merely going to ask you if wanted to go to Hogsmeade some time. You completely ruined my perfectly thought plan.”

She blushed. It was true. “Perfectly thought? Tell me, how was I supposed to be eased into the idea of a relationship when I was under the impression that a relationship could never happen because you’re with Theo and he’s with you? How was I supposed to know this would ever be in the cards?”

Draco scowled softly. “Fine, Theo’s intervention might’ve been necessary, I’ll grant you that. But let me be perfectly clear about one element of my plan I refuse to budge on.” His scowl softened as he eyed her from beneath his lashes. “I still intend to woo you before bedding you, Granger.”

“Woo me?” A chortle much too loud for the library slipped out. When Draco glared, she sobered. “Wait, you’re serious?”

“Quite. I’m going to romance you, and only after I feel you’ve been sufficiently wooed, do I intend to romance the pants off you, literally.”
This really was a completely new side to Draco, one she hadn’t anticipated, not in the slightest.

She flushed. “While that sounds lovely”—Draco probably knew how to ooze romance when he wasn’t pushing her buttons and goading her into fake fights—“I don’t need rose petals or…”

Her mind blanked. What did people usually do when romancing one another? Chocolate frogs didn’t exactly scream romance, but neither did those ostentatious heart-shaped boxes of candies some girls lost their minds over on Valentine’s Day.

Draco chuckled. “Clearly you’re in need of romancing if that’s all you can come up with.”

Perhaps he had a point. During their very short-lived relationship, Ron’s idea of romance had been bumping his foot against her beneath the table while they ate his mother’s cooking. But still…who knew what wealthy pureblood displays of courtship entailed? Something uncomfortably grandiose likely. “I don’t need it to be a thing.”

Besides, virginity was a construct. If he was dead set on it, couldn’t he romance her after?

He frowned. “I don’t intend on having your first time be a rough shag on the carpet, Hermione.”

Her insides fluttered, clenching. Beneath her breath, she muttered, “What if I want a rough shag on the carpet?”

Draco shut his eyes and dropped his back, groaning. “Bloody hell, woman. Are you trying to be the death of me?”

She laughed. “You’ve discovered my long con, pay you back with murder you via sexual arousal.”

He pinched the bridge of his nose and held up a hand. “Stop, stop it. You can’t say things like that.”

“What? Sexual arousal?” she asked.

He groaned pitifully. “This has been a rather emotionally taxing day. Don’t misunderstand, I’m happy, I just need to let it sink in. You talking about rough shags on carpets is going to do me in.”

He wasn’t wrong. It had been a day full of ups and downs and after having wanted this for so long, actually having it was almost too good to be true.

Quickly, so he couldn’t back away, she leaned and pressed her lips to his to show him just how real this was, only—she missed, grazing the corner of his mouth. How embarrassing. She was about to pull back when, chuckling slightly, Draco tilted his head, capturing her mouth fully, their lips realigning. Much better.

It was supposed to be a…an emotive kiss, one she poured her feelings into with a slow, gentle passion. Only, his tongue traced the bow of her upper lip and it felt so decadent that slowing down and stopping wasn’t an option.

Stumbling slightly, she crawled from her chair and into his, their lips only parting briefly in the move. Her legs once more straddled his lap as the kiss turned fervid. Everything south of her naval went molten, and pressure built between her legs making her ache. She rocked against him, this time on purpose.

Draco broke away with a gasp. “We shouldn’t.”
If he told her they couldn’t even do this without him wooing her, she was going to hex him and hex him good.

“We’re in the library,” he added.

That did nothing to douse the fire coursing through her veins like it should’ve. If anything, it sent another rush of heat to her core. The scent of old parchment surrounded them, and if she shut her eyes, she could smell the smoky sweetness of clove from Theo’s fingers on the collar of Draco’s robes.

Fumbling in her pocket, her fingers caught on the smooth wood of her wand. She withdrew it and circled it around them, casting a disillusionment charm before tucking her wand away once more.

Draco’s gray eyes had gone dark, mercurial silver eclipsed with the black of his pupils. His hands trembled against her hips. “Hermione.”

She’d felt desire before, but never like this. Like if she didn’t do something, the fire in her veins would burn her to a crisp.

With a shuddered breath, she took one of his shaking hands in hers and placed it beneath the hem of her skirt, sliding it up the inside of her thigh until his fingertips grazed the place where her leg met her body. “Please.”

Whatever remained of his resolve fractured as he slipped his fingers around the side of her drenched knickers and grazed her slit. He groaned. “Fuck.”

Her face flamed. He hadn’t said it, but she knew she was leaking, so slippery with arousal that his fingertips slid through her folds with ease. She bit her tongue, struggling not to mewl when he slicked her wetness up, fingers grazing her swollen, sensitive clit.

Draco was watching her face, eyes locked on hers, studying her reactions. “Yes?”

She nodded.

He pressed harder and circled her nub, and that time she couldn’t hold it in. A broken gasp fell off her tongue as she squirmed, pressing herself against his hand, rocking into it. “Yes. Yes.”

His tongue darted out, wetting his lips, and he rubbed her faster, his fingers bringing her to edge so much more quickly than she was ever able to achieve on her own. Maybe it was because it was him touching her finally, or because she’d been aching ever since Theo pressed her into the wall, but she was nearly about to combust.

She grabbed his shoulders, needing the stability, something to tether her to the ground and keep her anchored because she was several strokes of his fingers away from falling to pieces. It was too good, the pressure and pleasure too much and she couldn’t help but cry out at the sensation of heat spreading out concentrically from where he was touching. “Draco, I’m—”

The edge of his blunt, neatly trimmed nail grazed her clit, adding a subtle edge to her pleasure and she was done, the thread he’d been winding tighter and tighter finally snapping. As her nails bit into his shoulders through his robes, his hand, the one not buried between her legs, reached up and grabbed the nape of her neck, drawing her down to seize her mouth in a kiss that muffled the near shriek that would’ve passed her lips had he not swallowed the sound of her shattering.

Draco continued to stroke her through the aftershocks of pleasure, her insides occasionally still fluttering, clenching and unclenching. Slowly, by small measures, her muscles relaxed, fingers
releasing her death grip on his robes. Her breathing returned to something still quick, but
resembling normal.

She drew back, lifting her head. Draco’s face was flushed, his eyes dark and shining. He grinned,
looking inordinately pleased with himself.

She cleared her throat. “Wow.”

Draco, still looked proud, but there was also a softness in his eyes, his smile, as he stared at her
undoubtedly flushed and sweaty face with an almost reverent expression.

“You’re stunning,” he breathed.

Gods, she wasn’t ever going to get used to him complimenting her. She chuckled and shifted
slightly, flushing deeper. Draco’s hand was still tucked beneath her knickers, fingers resting gently
against her pubic bone.

“So are you.” She reached up, brushing her hair out of her face. “And your hair isn’t a total
disaster.”

He laughed. “True.”

“Hey.” She wacked him softly on the shoulder.

Moving slowly, like he didn’t particularly want to, Draco withdrew his fingers and dropped his
hand to his side. Then he leaned in, brushing his lips against hers softly in a gentle kiss, not unlike
the one she’d intended to give him, the one that set everything off.

“I don’t deserve you,” he whispered against her mouth.

Something in her chest splintered, fracturing at the broken confession.

In third year, he most certainly had not deserved her. Not in fourth or fifth or sixth, not last year,
either. But Draco had changed, was no longer the spoiled, fearful boy blinded by his family’s
bigotry, indoctrinated into their dark beliefs. She’d go to her grave swearing that he had saved them
all, that had it not been for him, the world they lived in would be a very different one, grim and
hopeless, if they lived to see it at all.

He’d apologized, was working to atone for his misdeeds, and in her eyes he was already redeemed.
But even then, the concept of deserving someone was terribly subjective.

Reaching out, she ran her fingers through the blond hair atop his head. The strands were soft as
silk, the ends slightly cool, untouched by the warmth of his scalp. He shut his eyes with a soft sigh
as she played with his hair. She could really get used to this.

“I don’t know what it means to deserve me,” she confessed. “I’m not—I’m not perfect and I think
you all of people should know that.”

He opened his eyes and his mouth, but she shushed him.

“I’m opinionated and I’m stubborn, terribly so, and sometimes I hold the people I love to unfair
standards because I care. I’m bossy and I don’t do well with being told I can’t do things. I’m not
some paragon of virtue like people want to believe. Brightest Witch of Our Age, one third of the
Golden Trio, war heroine.” She scoffed. “Maybe I’m that, but I’m still figuring things out, just like
everyone else. I’m not asking for perfection from you, Draco. Merlin, I don’t even mind arguing
with you sometimes. I actually kind of like it. What it comes down to is I just want you to be the best person you can be. I just want you. And if we’re doing this, I need you to understand that.”

“I want to be that,” he whispered. “I want to be that person for you, the best I can be. I don’t want to ever give you cause to hate me again.”

She shook her head. “I won’t.”

She wasn’t concerned about that. Her only concern was that she was much too close to falling for him than was reasonable.

Chapter End Notes

I'm currently cleaning up the next chapter, and I should have it posted shortly! I'm a little slow to reply to comments, but I love hearing your thoughts and reactions! Thanks again for reading!
Chapter Nine

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone! Again, thank you all for reading and for all the love you've shown this fic. I appreciate it more than you know!

So, I have some thoughts regarding how I think/wish polyamory was treated in the wizarding world, so this chapter includes a few of those notions. I touch on the subject in later chapters as well. Just a headcanon, but for all the wizarding world, or parts of it, are hung up on blood purity, I like to think they're less conservative regarding other issues. Plus, the thought of handling social stigmas on top of everything else this crowd has gone through sounds exhausting, so I wanted to grant them a bit of a reprieve. Just my creative interpretation :)

I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Draco’s invitation to Hogsmeade? It turned out he was one-hundred percent serious.

“Hogsmeade, really?” She fiddled with the feathered end of her quill, smoothing its edges between her thumb and forefinger. “Where would you want to go?”

It was highly doubtful Draco wanted to hang out in the Three Broomsticks. If he was even allowed to set foot in the door.

“We could go to Madame Pudifoot’s,” he suggested.

Theo nodded.

“The tea room? Isn’t that…” Usually only frequented by couples, the tea room was pretty much snog central. “Where people go on dates?”

Draco and Theo both stared.

“Oh!” She set her quill down and clasped her fingers together. “So you wanted this to be a date, then?”

This thing between them, the three of them, was new. And for all the talking they’d done about how they felt, they hadn’t exactly discussed what they were, not in any kind of official capacity. All or nothing wasn’t quite a label. And they certainly hadn’t discussed what they’d tell people, if they’d tell people.

They’d only met once since she had…well, beyond snogged Draco senseless in the stacks, and it had merely been a regular meeting to work on their project in the library. Strictly above board. So, yes, maybe they’d shared a few meaningful glances and snuck in a kiss or two in parting and Theo’s hands might’ve…wandered, but that was it. Okay, and fine, the tone had been…different. Or rather, that undercurrent of tension she’d been ignoring? It was as if someone had turned the brightness up on a previously dim light and now that light illuminated everything, revealing their actions, their banter, the flirtation, for what it really was. They didn’t have to pretend anymore, and
they weren’t.

But they certainly hadn’t discussed bringing this very new relationship into the public.

Which was exactly what going to Hogsmeade would do. Going to Madame Pudifoot’s would make a statement, a bold one.

“Yes?” Draco ran his fingers through his hair. “That was my intention, yes.”

Theo watched her, silent.

Was she ready for that, everyone knowing? If the reaction to her friendship with the Slytherins had been a mixed bag, Merlin only knew how people would react to her entering into a relationship with them, both of them. She could already imagine the names she’d be called, the howlers she’d probably get.

She’d have to tell her friends. Ginny had mostly gotten over the fact that she and Hermione weren’t going to be sisters in law, but she hadn’t warmed up to the idea of Hermione’s friendship with the pair. She was suspicious, certain that they had some sort of ulterior, nefarious motives for befriending Hermione, and Neville, to a lesser degree, was, too. Her only saving grace had been that no one had assumed there was anything beyond friendship happening between the three of them. Not yet, at least.

Dating one of them of one would have caused enough of a fuss. What would her friends—not to mention Harry and Ron—make of her being a member of a very different trio?

“Unless you’d rather not go,” Draco muttered.

“I didn’t say that.” Apparently the time to have this conversation was now. “I only meant, we hadn’t discussed what we would tell people.”

Theo’s eyes sharpened. “Had you planned on keeping this a secret?”

“No?” Her tone did little to soften the look on Theo’s face. All it did was make Draco frown and look away. “I don’t know. We hadn’t talked about that part of, this. If we tell people, when we tell people, what we tell people.”

Theo arched a brow. “The truth, perhaps?”

“Which is?” she asked, voice peaking, fraying. “Am I your girlfriend?”

She wasn’t trying to be juvenile about it, but she’d only ever been in one relationship and it had been a half-arsed one at that. She wasn’t exactly sure how this was supposed to go.

“I don’t really care what you call yourself, Hermione,” he said. “As long as it’s ours.”

Warmth filled her chest.

Draco cleared his throat. “But if you don’t want to tell anyone, if you’re ashamed—”

“I’m not! This isn’t—this doesn’t have anything to do with who you are. It’s only that people will probably find this setup…unconventional.”

“If people don’t like it, they can take a long walk off a short pier, then,” Theo said.

That was easy for him to say. It wasn’t right, but she’d get the most…attention once their
relationship came to light. And not just because of who she was and who they were, but because she was a woman. She’d be called a slag, worse. It was utterly sexist and vile, but that wasn’t anything new. The media hadn’t exactly been kind to her over the years. Rita Skeeter would have a bloody field day with this development.

Then again, Theo and Draco would likely both be deemed blood traitors for taking up with a Muggleborn, so there was that.

Did she care about what people thought of her? Unfortunately, a little. It was a remnant of a time when she’d been less confident, the bushy-haired bookworm friend of Harry Potter accused of dosing Krum with a love potion because no way would he have asked her to the Yule Ball otherwise. She cared, but enough to risk losing this, what she’d wanted for so long? No.

“Besides,” Theo added, a little less severe. “This isn’t as unconventional as you’re painting it to be.”

Her brow furrowed.

“Polygamy was actually rather common, particularly amongst Purebloods, up until the first Wizarding War. Triads particularly so.”

She hadn’t heard anything about that. Then again, she hadn’t been perusing many books on marriage and mating practices of wizards, either. “Really?”

Draco was looking a bit more at ease since her vehement refusal that shame had anything to do with her trepidation. He nodded. “Especially in situations where the continuance of a blood line was paramount. Two men couldn’t exactly conceive an heir. Or women, as the case might be.”

“An especially critical issue if one or both were the last of their houses,” Theo added.

*How interesting.* “I’m guessing surrogacy isn’t common practice amongst witches and wizards, is it?”

Draco shook his head.

“And they wouldn’t just have a marriage of convenience to create an heir and then, I don’t know —”

“Have a dalliance? A lover on the side?” Theo supplied.

She nodded.

“Marriages of convenience aren’t unheard of, yes. And some even involved more than two people. But lest you misunderstand, procreation wasn’t the sole reason for polygamous relationships, merely one. Love matches were equally as common. Adultery, however, is actually quite frowned upon amongst most witches and wizards, especially Purebloods.”

Well. That certainly did not fit her mental image of the wizarding aristocracy.

“Marriage isn’t only a commitment, it’s a bond,” Draco said. “A magical bond. It’s not a piece of paper and a tax right off like it is with Muggles. You’re literally tying your magic to someone else, intertwining your magics together. It’s sacred. Practically a rite.”

“You must’ve realized divorce is all but unheard of, the rate is so low,” Theo said. “And as for adultery, it sullies the bond, weakens the magic of everyone involved.”
Like horcruxes of infidelity.

“But marriages involving more than two people were—are, accepted?”

Draco shrugged. “Magic doesn’t care if you’re monogamous, it cares that you’re faithful.”

Fascinating. “There doesn’t happen to be a book on this, does there?”

Theo and Draco broke out into twin grins, making her blush.

“Probably,” Draco offered. “Most of its common knowledge if—” He winced.

If you’re not a Muggleborn.

She sighed. Now that she knew was lacking critical information on a part of wizarding culture, she’d just have to catch herself up to speed.

“You said it was common practice until the first Wizarding War. What changed?” she asked.

“It’s not that it’s *uncommon* now,” Theo stressed.

“Pansy’s uncle is married to two witches,” Draco added.

Theo nodded. “As for what changed, it’s that—my answer will probably make you angry.”

She braced herself.

“Some people turned their backs on the idea in favor of adopting Muggle values regarding what a marriage is supposed to look like. Likely why it was more common amongst Purebloods to begin with.”

She could’ve laughed at the way Theo nearly winced, waiting for her reaction.

“I don’t believe Muggles are perfect. They make a lot of mistakes, make life harder for themselves, but that has nothing to do with having magic or not having magic. I think that’s a part of being human.” She shrugged. “I think this falls under the category of *cultural differences*. I mean, there are certain parts of the Muggle world, certain religions, where polygamy is or has been practiced.”

Theo nodded. “So, if you’re worried about people finding this odd, don’t. I mean, people will talk, but that will mostly have to do with *who* we are, not the fact that there are three of us.”

That was…a slight relief. Not that she needed to justify her choices to anyone, but knowing their relationship wasn’t unconventional or even uncommon removed a massive hurdle. Changing the way society viewed her relationship would’ve been tricky, but she could handle defending her feelings.

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“Luna and I are heading to Gladrags before meeting up with a group at the Three Broomsticks. You in?” Ginny asked, happily muching away at her full English.

Hermione shook her head. “Thanks, but I already have plans.”

Ginny arched a ginger brow. “With who?”

Well, here went nothing. “Theo and Draco. We’re going to Madame Puddifoot’s.”
Ginny’s whole face screwed up with disgust. “Oh, blech. You’d seriously rather third wheel with the snakes than spend time with us?”

That was off-base and unfair. She’d just spent the prior evening with Ginny and Luna, so it wasn’t as if she’d abandoned her friends. Not that Ginny had any room to talk. Harry had taken to fire calling her in the evenings and well…Ginny was the sort to drop everything when that happened. Not that Hermione blamed her, just the hypocrisy grated.

“I’m not a third wheel,” she said, struggling to keep her voice even and free of obvious indignation. Because she wasn’t a third wheel, not in the way Ginny meant, at least.

Ginny looked at her pityingly. “Hermione, I haven’t wanted to overstep and make you cross, but I’m worried and I know Ron and Harry are, too. What are you really getting out of this friendship? I know you have a penchant for helping the less fortunate, and we all love you for it, but Nott and Malfoy don’t need you to help reform them. The Ministry has that handled. You don’t need to put yourself through that.”

She glared across the table. “I’m not reforming them, Ginny.”

“Reforming, helping, you know what I mean.” Ginny waved her fork. “It just feels like it’s only a matter of time before you’re making buttons and knitting hats for this new cause.”

Ouch. Her jaw dropped. “That’s not what this is about.”

“What is it about, then?”

She took a deep breath. “I like them.”

Ginny’s look of pity intensified. “Fine, you like them. But enough to play third wheel and watch them snog over tea?”

“I am not a bloody third wheel,” her voice rose, her patience fracturing.

Ginny shook her head. “You are, Hermione and there would be nothing wrong with it—you hang out with Harry and me—if not for the fact that they’re snakes. Lower than low. I mean, Merlin, Malfoy nearly went to Azkaban and there’s just something dodgy about Nott who I think—”

“I mean, I fancy them.”

Ginny froze with a forkful of beans halfway to her mouth.

“And it’s not just me who feels that way. My feelings are very much requited.”

She held her breath as Ginny blinked at her owlishly before the gravity of her words sunk in and she dropped her spoon, beans splattering against the table. “Tell me you’re joking.”

“I’m not.”

Ginny looked as if she was about to be sick. “Hermione, I—you’re—with them? Both of them?”

“Yes.”

The greenish pallor of Ginny’s face clashed terribly with her hair, her freckles standing out in stark relief against her skin. “You mean you’re—”
She made a crude gesture with her hands.

Oh, this not a conversation she’d wanted to have. She lifted her hands to her face. Beneath her palms, her cheeks radiated heat. “No. I mean, not yet. Not really. It’s not—it’s more.”

Ginny lifted a hand to her mouth. “I think I’m going to puke.”

She rolled her eyes. “Honestly, Ginny? Could you act like an adult for a moment? This is—they’re important to me, okay? And I know, we’ve had out differences—”

Ginny snorted. “Differences. Right.”

“—but the war changed us all. We all had to do things we aren’t particularly proud of to survive. They’re different now. They’re not who you think they are. I don’t think they ever really were.”

“Merlin.” Ginny stared at her in obvious shock. “You’re serious about this. You really have feelings for them. Both of them.”

She nodded.

“Since when?” Ginny asked.

Hermione winced. “You don’t want to know.”

“That long?” Ginny’s eyes went wide.

She hummed.

“And how long have you been”—she wiggled her head—“more than friends.”

“Officially? A week,” she said. “But I think we’ve been stepping around it for longer than that.”

Ginny reached for a pumpkin juice, draining the cup as if she wished it were something stronger. “Ron’s going to lose his head, you know.”

“I know.” She winced, picking up her fork and scraping her scrambled eggs around her plate. “I won’t ask you to keep it a secret—”

“Oh, I’m not telling him this.” Ginny shook her head. “No way. You can be the bearer of this distinctly bad news.”

“Ginny.”

“What? If you’re expecting me to like this, you’re out of your mind. I loathe Malfoy and Nott isn’t much better.”

She set her fork down, pushing her plate to the side. She’d lost her appetite. “You don’t have to like this. I’m not asking you to. Just, can you trust me? Can you accept that I know what I’m doing and”—she had to swallow, her throat suddenly narrowing—“for the first time in a long time, I’m happy. Really, truly happy.”

Ginny stared, lips pursed. After a long moment, her shoulders dropped as her ire visibly deflated. In its place was a reluctant, if not chagrined acceptance. If she knew anything about Hermione, it had to be that once she put her mind to something, it was next to impossible to dissuade her. “I’m happy you’re happy, even I think you’ve gone barmy. I’ll try to keep my opinions to myself, but I make no promises.”
Hermione reached across the table and squeezed Ginny’s hand. “Thank you. That’s all I ask.”

Ginny sighed. “Just don’t come running to me if this blows up in your face, all right? I’ll be the first to tell you I told you so.”

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That had really gone better than she could’ve hoped. Sure, Ginny hadn’t been pleased, but she didn’t need to like it. She only needed to accept it and she had, albeit grudgingly.

But if she, a person who openly hated Malfoy, could support Hermione, well, there was hope yet.

A bit buoyed, Hermione parted ways with Ginny outside the Great Hall and made the trek to the center courtyard where Theo and Draco had said they’d meet. Sure enough, they were standing beneath one of the large stone archways, waiting. Wearing dark jeans that clung to their muscled thighs, and soft-looking woolen jumpers instead of their uniforms, they looked unfairly good in Muggle clothing. Mouthwateringly handsome, truthfully.

She stopped beside them, cheeks aching from the intensity of her grin. “Good morning.”

Draco laughed, the sound open and free, and it did something funny to her stomach. “Good mood, Granger?”

“Actually, yes.” She reached out, snatching his hand and tangling their fingers together without a care who saw. “I told Ginny.”

Draco’s eyes widened to the size of dinner plates. “You did?”

“How’d she take it?” Theo took a step closer, buffeting her from the wind.

She laughed. “Terribly.”

They both frowned at her like she’d gone mad, laughing at such dismal sounding news.

Squeezing Draco’s hand, she amended, “But she seemed to accept it. Not happily, but she’s glad I am. Happy, that is. Which is to say, you’re not in immediate danger of being on the receiving end of her bat bogey hex.”

Theo grimaced. “Small favors, eh?”

“It could’ve gone worse. And Ginny’s a tough critic. Her reluctant acceptance is better than I could’ve hoped for, and I’m sure with time—”

“She’ll soften from hatred to mere disdain?” Draco asked, voice wry and lips twisted.

“Something like that.” She nodded.

Theo sighed. “If you’re happy with the outcome of the conversation, then I suppose it’s a win.”

“Trust me. It was a win.” She assured them.

Draco tilted his head toward the path that led off the ground to Hogsmeade. “Shall we?”

As soon as they were out of the shadowy courtyard, Draco made to tug his hand from hers, but she held tight. He looked at her, brow furrowed. “You don’t have to prove anything, Hermione.”
Maybe, maybe not. But now that she’d not only set her mind to this, but also her heart, she planned on carrying it through with courage, even if half of it was bluster. She scowled at him softly. “You’re telling me I can’t hold your hand if I want to?”

Theo snickered and stepped closer, jostling her side lightly as their arms brushed. “Straight into the deep end. Should we have expected otherwise?”

Rubbing his thumb along the back of her hand, Draco sighed deeply, fondly. “Gryffindors.”

The walk to Hogsmeade was rather uneventful, save for the few stares they garnered. A few passerbies glanced at the trio, their eyes flickering down to Hermione and Draco’s clasped hands. One girl, a Ravenclaw fifth year, tripped over her own feet for how intently she was staring, but no one said a thing.

Theo held the door open when they entered Madame Puddifoot’s, ushering them inside the cozy tea room with its tacky pink décor. At least it smelled nice, like jasmine and honey and spice. A bit like Theo, really.

“Table.” Draco nodded to the back of the room, tucked out of the way of the main path. Not that the shop was crowded, thankfully. Several tables were occupied with cozy looking couples, and there was a group of Hufflepuff girls sitting near the front giggling, but easily half the shop was empty. For a first date, a first date in public, it was rather ideal.

They settled in at the table in the back, Hermione and Theo on one side, Draco on the other. Madame Puddifoot bustled over, floating cups and saucers bringing up the rear. They landed neatly in front of them, rattling only slightly. “What can I do you for, dears?”

“A pot of Darjeeling and”—Draco smiled a little sheepishly—“do you have any of those apple fritters you had last month?”

Hermione bit the inside of her cheek to keep from grinning.

Order received, Madame Puddifoot retreated back into the curtained off section of the shop.

“Don’t,” Draco warned as soon as they were alone, the tips of his ears pinking.

Theo snickered. “You’re adorable.”

“You really are,” she agreed.

The flush spread down his neck. He sniffed, lifting his chin. “Well, I suppose I am that.”

She laughed so hard she snorted, much to both their crinkle-eyed amusement. Thankfully the kettle and the rest of their tea service arrived, floating to land gently on the table between them. After allowing the tea a moment to steep, Theo filled their cups which they then doctored accordingly. Theo took his without cream or sugar, Draco with three sugars and no cream, and she dropped in one sugar cube and added only a splash of milk.

Draco’s ankle brushed against hers beneath the table. He lifted his cup in the air, his eyes smiling. “To new beginnings.”

Hermione shook her head, smiling behind the rim of her cup. “Beginnings? In the wise words of Mr. Darcy, I was in the middle before I knew I had begun.”

Oh, she was going to enjoy forcing Jane Austen on them.
Draco set his cup down atop his saucer and smirked. “Maybe you’re right. I cannot fix on the hour, or the spot, or the look, or the words which laid the foundation. It is too long ago.”

Her jaw dropped. Holy Merlin, first Shakespeare and now he just—

“Careful, Draco,” Theo warned, grinning dangerously. “We’re in public. Any more of that and she’ll try to jump your bones.”

She squirmed atop her chair.

Draco’s eyes darkened. “It wasn’t my intention to start something.”

She took a long sip of her tea before speaking. “Well, do you intend to finish it?”

Theo groaned and his cup rattled as he set it down roughly atop his saucer. “Fuck.”

Yes, that.

She wanted that. She wanted this, too, conversation and dates and whatever else it was Draco deemed romance. But it was hard to focus on any of it when other desires battled for dominance. Like the desire to strip them bare and taste their skin, to catalogue the differences of their moans, find out what made them sigh and groan and toss their heads back in satisfaction. Not to mention the desire to be touched in turn, to be tasted, taken.

After too long spent trying to survive, she wanted to feel, wanted happiness and to give it in return. Concentrating on anything but satisfying those long pent-up desires was next to impossible because—what was stopping her, really?

Draco quickly stood, his chair scraping against the floor in his haste. His nostrils were flared and he spoke through clenched teeth. “I’ll be right back.”

He made a beeline for the adjoining hall, ducking around the corner.

“Loo,” Theo said with a dirty grin. “Likely gone to wank. He’ll back in a moment.”

She coughed. “He’s what?”

Theo chuckled darkly beneath his breath. “I’m kidding. Maybe. This is how he gets when he’s frustrated. Agitated, grumpy, whatever you want to call it. I know his tells. He’ll be fine when he gets back.”

She huffed through the slight sheen of embarrassment. “Frustrated? He’s the one who suggested this when we could be in the castle—”

Getting off.

Theo hummed, staring at her intently. “So Draco gets grumpy and you get—what, indignant? You’re more alike than you think.”

“I’m not indignant, I’m…”

His brow quirked, lips pulling into a sinful, kissable smirk. “Horny?”

A tiny whimper slipped from between her lips. Terribly horny.

Theo dropped his hand to her thigh and traced lazy circles there that she could feel through her
corduroy trousers. “He’s wanted you for so long, Hermione. He wants it to be perfect. You can understand that, can’t you?”

Yes, except, as she’d said, she didn’t need rose petals and all that rot. It would be perfect because it would be him. If only she could make him see that.

“I have no doubt it will be perfect,” she muttered. “If only it could be perfect now.”

He smiled softly. “Just a little more patience, love. I promise.”

Patience, her arse. Theo was just about the least patient person she’d met. He had no room to speak.

“Draco doesn’t need to be patient if he’s feeling frustrated,” she argued. “He has you.”

The thought of Draco taking out his frustrations, sharing in them with Theo, the both of them taking their pleasure from each other, getting off in the privacy of their dorm and maybe even thinking about her a little when they did had a rush of sticky wetness seeping from her.

Theo’s eyes darkened, flickering down to her lips. “So will you.”

His fingers squeezed her thigh tightly as he leaned in, erasing the distance between their faces and kissing her gently. Much gentler than she wanted. She nipped his bottom lip, teasing out a growl from his throat. His hand slid up her thigh, stopping just before his reach became indecent in public. But at least he kissed her harder, with the intensity she desired even if it meant the heat between her thighs only grew hotter, more insistent.

“Ohem.”

They broke apart at the delicate clearing of a throat. Her fingers immediately went to her mouth, pressing gently against her bruised lips, as she glanced up at whoever had interrupted them mid-snog.

Cool, blue eyes stared down at her, silent in their scrutiny.

A lump the size of a dragon’s egg formed in her throat.

There, standing right beside their table, was Narcissa Malfoy.

Chapter End Notes

Cliffhanger, I know. But there’s smut in the next chapter, so... :)
Chapter Ten

Chapter Notes

I know, I know, that cliffhanger was a little mean of me, but I hope this chapter makes up for it ;)

Happy reading!

See the end of the chapter for more notes


Yes, she certainly sounded pleased. Just about as pleased, in fact, as when Hermione had accidently Polyjuiced herself into Millicent Bulstrode’s cat.

Dropping her fingers from her kiss swollen lips, Hermione nodded. “Mrs. Malfoy.”

If the woman was looking for a better greeting, she certainly didn’t act like it. She was more focused on Theo, her eyes sharp and lips pursed as she stared down at him. “Theodore. You wouldn’t happen to know where my son is, would you?”

Oh, bugger. This looked awful. Here she was, snogging Theo, Draco’s boyfriend. Hers, too, but Narcissa didn’t know that. She didn’t, right? No, there was no way she knew, not based on how she was staring at Theo like she could crucio him with her eyes.

Theo must’ve had the same thought because he looked a little grim, little creases forming around the sides of his mouth. “Narcissa—”

“Mother?”

Oh, thank Merlin.

Draco approached the table, arms limp at his sides and his expression much more relaxed than when he’d left the table, save for a slight puckering between his brows as he looked at his mother.

“What are you doing here?” he asked, reaching out and grasping her arms lightly, leaning close to press a kiss to each of her cheeks.

“Shopping and I thought I’d pop in for tea.” She stole a backwards glance at the table and shook her head. “Apparently I wasn’t the only one with that idea.”

Draco dropped his hand to the back of Theo’s chair. “Would you care to join us?”

Obviously he had to offer, it was his mother, but that didn’t mean she had to like it. At least this whole impromptu run-in had sufficiently snuffed out her arousal.

“Us?” Mrs. Malfoy’s eyes darted between the three of them, lingering on the sliver of space between Theo’s chair and hers, and the hand that Draco had resting against the chair back. “I wouldn’t want to intrude.”
Theo appeared to gather himself, his manners kicking in. “Not at all. Please sit.”

He pivoted, pulling out a chair from a nearby table. He presented the seat to her, much like he had for Hermione on that fateful first day of the term.

Narcissa sat primly, handbag clasped atop her lap, her fingers curling around its handle. Draco rounded the table and took his seat, automatically pouring his mother a cup of tea he proceeded to fix to her liking.

“Thank you, Draco.” She took a sip, nodded in satisfaction, and lifted her eyes, pinning Hermione with her stare. “Miss Granger, I wasn’t aware you were acquainted with Theodore, let alone quite so... friendly.”

If she could’ve melted through the floor to escape her mortification, she’d have done it, just like that.

“I’m—”

“She saw us,” Theo blurted, looking at Draco. “Your mother saw us kissing.”

She hadn’t known how she had planned to answer, but it certainly didn’t matter now that Theo had decided to grab the bull by the horns.

Draco’s eyes widened. “Oh.”

Narcissa’s eyes had narrowed further into appraising slits.

“Mother, it’s not what you think.”

She arched an impeccably shaped brow. “Oh? It’s not?”

Draco sat up straighter and rolled his shoulders back. He nodded once. “There’s been a development I hadn’t yet had the opportunity to bring to your attention.”

Narcissa glanced at Theo askance and hummed. “I see.”

If not for the fact that she was nearly holding her breath, she might’ve laughed. Narcissa Malfoy most certainly did not see.

“Theo and I are very much still together, Mother.” Draco sighed.

Narcissa turned her sharp gaze on Hermione, causing her to flinch before she could steel herself. “And you’re fine with Theodore amusing himself with someone else, Draco? Honestly, Miss Granger, I’m surprised by you. I didn’t think you were the type.”

_The type?_ Her brain buzzed, temples pulsing as her whole body flushed. Beneath the table, Theo’s hand closed around hers. Whether it was to comfort her or keep her from reaching for her wand, who knew.

“Mother,” Draco bit out. “I’d ask that you _not_ speak to Hermione like that again.”

Narcissa turned her head to the side, studying her son closely. She dropped her voice, “Draco?”

He turned his gaze from his mother to her, his expression softening as he met her eyes. “Hermione and I are as much together as she and Theo and as Theo and myself.”
There they were, all the cards, on the table.

“Oh. Oh.” Mrs. Malfoy’s red lips parted before snapping shut as she turned back to face Hermione. She cleared her throat and inclined her head slightly. “My apologies, Miss Granger, for gravely misreading the situation.”

Hell must’ve frozen over for Narcissa Malfoy to be apologizing to her, a Muggleborn.

What was she supposed to say that? Oh, no worries Mrs. Malfoy, totally understandable. It makes perfect sense that you’d want my guts for garters if I was helping Theo cheat on your son. Just a simple misunderstanding. Please feel free to insult me some more. Okay, she could do without the insults, but she and Theo had painted a rather incriminating picture. “It’s…fine.”

“How recent a development, might I ask?” Narcissa was studying Hermione’s face, eyes tracking across her features, drinking her in as if seeing her for the first time.

Draco took a deep breath. “It’s new. A week.”

“And in that week you couldn’t have found the time to write your mother regarding this development?”

“One week, mother. I’ve been busy.”

Narcissa’s lips twitched. “Ah, yes, busy. I can see how this development would leave you rather… preoccupied.”

Wrong time to take a sip of tea. Hermione coughed on her mouthful of Darjeeling and scrambled for a napkin. Theo quickly passed her his and she blotted her lips, her cheeks stinging from the intensity of her flush. Preoccupied? Merlin, did Narcissa Malfoy just drop an innuendo like it was nothing, or had she imagined that?

Narcissa hummed, eyes still appraising. Except now she was smiling outright. “My son has been rather taken by you for quite some time, Miss Granger.”

Draco’s answering groan was accompanied by a snicker from Theo.

She swallowed thickly, careful not spittle tea across the table this time. “I’m aware. Though I wasn’t aware that you were.”

“Oh, yes.” Narcissa nodded. She cleared her throat gently. “That Granger girl received higher marks than me, Mother. Granger’s quite skilled in potions, Mother. Mother, would you believe I saw Granger reading my favorite book the other day? Granger looked quite fetching at the Yule Ball, Mother. Granger this and Granger that. Quite taken, indeed.”

She blushed, glancing over at Draco whose skin was mottled with red splotches from the intensity of his flush. Draco dropped his voice, pleading, “Mum.”

Narcissa leaned over, patting Draco on the cheek. “Can a mother not be happy for her son, Draco?”

Was she? Happy? She certainly seemed to be, but why? Hermione was—she refused to touch her forearm, to pay it credence.

Draco grumbled, but Narcissa didn’t seem to care. She turned back to Hermione. “My son’s happiness means everything to me. Theodore knows that.”
Theo nodded, face softening as if maybe, just maybe, he’d been on the receiving end of a similar chat once.

“Of course,” Hermione said. She tried not to fidget but failed, knotting her napkin between her fingers. “It matters to me, too.”

The tension at the corners of Narcissa’s mouth abated, her expression softening. The look shining in her eyes communicated that had been the right thing to say, as if she had issued an unofficial test and Hermione had passed it. “I am most glad to hear that.”

Narcissa took another sip of her tea before standing. Draco and Theo both stood, as well, consummate gentlemen. “I certainly won’t intrude any longer. Miss Granger, we must get together for tea sometime, just the two of us.”

What in the world? More than likely Narcissa was just being polite. There was no way in hell, she would sincerely invite her to tea. “All right.”

“You’ve never invited me to solo tea,” Theo joked.

Narcissa patted him on the cheek. “You already know I love you, Theodore. Is my son not paying you enough attention that you’re so desperate for it elsewhere?”

“Oh, not to worry.” Theo dimpled. “Draco’s quite attentive.”

Draco pinched the bridge of his nose with a sigh while his mother actually rolled her eyes.

“Charming as ever, Theodore. Draco, darling, it was wonderful seeing you.” Narcissa pulled him in for a hug. “I expect you’ll write me soon? Or will I need to wait another week?”

“You can expect my owl tomorrow, Mother.”

And just like that, Narcissa breezed out of the tea shop, her dark blue robes billowing gracefully behind her. The delicate scent of bergamot, vetiver, and jasmine lingered in the air, a sure sign that Hermione’s imagination hadn’t cooked up the entire run-in.

“Are you okay?” Draco asked, reaching for her hand across the table.

Slumping down in her seat, she shrugged. “I don’t know. That was—”

“Narcissa.” Theo nodded sagely, reaching out to rub her shoulder in commiseration.

“I really wasn’t expecting any of that,” she said.

“I swear my mother really does mean well,” Draco said, mouth pulling to the side in apology. “She can be…a lot.”

Narcissa Malfoy, a lot? Whoever would’ve thought that? She had to bite the inside of her cheek to keep from snorting rudely.

Still, Narcissa’s breathtaking, whirlwind of a confrontation—she had to give the woman credit, because like a snake she’d struck fast and hard, going for the throat without being boisterous about it—had left her with questions. “Once you explained, she seemed…happy? Unsurprised? Shockingly not scandalized? Why?”

Draco tucked his napkin beneath his saucer and nodded. “As she said, I haven’t exactly been discrete with my feelings, Hermione. Plus, my mother’s known me my whole life; it’s difficult to
keep things from her, even if I try. And she means it when she says she wants me to be happy.”

She was getting that.

“But I’m—” she broke off, not wanting to sully the day, and yet… “Not exactly ideal, am I?”

Draco caught on, mouth twisting wryly. “Mother’s quite willing to set aside the beliefs with which she was brought up if it serves her. But she is honestly changing, as well. Slowly, very slowly, but the Ministry has required her to take far more extensive classes on Muggle studies than even me. It’s helping.”

She nodded. She’d never considered Narcissa evil, mostly a pawn just like so many others. And like Draco, she’d proven herself capable of doing the right thing, or at least right thing adjacent, in the end. Maybe she was capable of changing for the better, too. Now, Lucius on the other hand… well, she wasn’t going to hold her breath for some great change of heart, but who knew what a year in Azkaban could do?

“As for the shockingly not scandalized”—Theo traced a finger across her wrist—“I love to tell you I told you so, that this really isn’t unconventional.”

She was starting to get that. And it was…freeing.

With the interruption, their tea had gone cold. Yes, they could’ve ordered another pot or used a warming charm, but as lovely as Draco’s intentions for their date had been, they’d had enough excitement for one day. Escaping back to the castle was the new plan.

A good plan, only, walking back to the castle meant passing Gladrags and of course Ginny and Luna just had to be leaving the store just as they were walking by. Ginny’s gaze immediately fell on where Theo had his arm draped around Hermione’s shoulders. She wrinkled her nose and looked away, tongue poking out briefly.

“Ginny,” Hermione greeted, aiming for chipper and instead sounding as frazzled as she felt. “Luna. Hello.”

Luna smiled in her usual, soft, dreamy manner. “Hermione. You’ve gotten rid of your wrackspurts. Finally. I was worried.”

Right. “Thanks, Luna.”

A slight frown creased Luna’s brow as she continued to stare. “Only now you have blibbering humdingers, nasty buggers.”

“Erm, blibbering humdingers, you say?” she asked.

Luna hummed. “They feed on frustration and agitation. Are you feeling frustrated, Hermione?”

Theo coughed into his fist while she shut her eyes, mortified.

“Actually”—Luna’s pale eyes studied the three of them—“You all have them. You should really do something about that before it turns into an actual infestation.”

“Sure, Luna, thanks,” she forced out.

During their exchange, Ginny had begun to stare, eyes narrowed.

Draco noticed, too. In a staggeringly polite move, he dipped his chin in a curt nod. “Weasley.
You’re looking…” He struggled, mouth puckering. “Well.”

“Sod off, Malfoy.” Ginny snorted.

Draco shot Hermione look that screamed *I tried.*

Theo boldly stuck out his hand. “I don’t think we’ve been properly introduced. I’m Theodore.”

Ginny rolled her eyes. “I know who you are, Nott. Merlin, Hermione, you really know how to pick them.”

“Oh, I see.” Luna nodded, smiling breezily before Hermione could speak out in defense of her choices. “You’re in a *coetus fidelium.*”

She frowned. Roughly translated, that was *faithful group.* Which yes, they were, but she hadn’t realized the magical community had a special name for it beyond polyamory or triad. She’d have to ask Theo or Draco later, once they were alone.

Except, Luna must’ve caught the look on her face because she added, “Which of course isn’t to be confused with *coitus fidelium,* though I expect there would be overlap, unless…that would explain your frustration, wouldn’t it?”

“Right then,” Hermione blurted. “We were actually heading back to the castle. We have our group project to work on.”

Luna smiled. “Yes, I imagine you do.”

*Merlin.* “Not like—you know what, never mind. I’ll see you both later.”

“Goodbye Hermione, Theodore, Draco.” The wind ruffled Luna’s hair as she waved.

Draco and Theo both nodded politely but kept their mouths shut, a smart decision because who knew how Luna might twist their words.


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Draco wasn’t silent on the walk back to the castle, but he was reserved and clearly thinking hard, his forehead marred with lines and his hands tucked in his pockets. Upon reaching the courtyard, he inclined his head in the direction of the Quidditch pitch. “I think I’m going to fly for a while. I’ll see you both later.”

“He needs some time alone, Hermione,” Theo explained, face grim. “He needs to blow off some steam.”

That was foot-stompingly frustrating, but she refrained, instead crossing her arms across below her chest. “Why? Was it what Ginny said?”
Theo leaned back against the stone wall, ankles crossed in front of him. “Did you not notice how he was biting his tongue? Draco doesn’t want to make you cross and referring to one of your best girlfriends as Weaslette or something similar wasn’t going to do him any favors.”

Point taken, but… “I’m not expecting him—or you—to get along perfectly with all my friends. I’ll be pleased if the first few meetings don’t end in bloodshed, quite honestly.”

Theo laughed. “Good. Set a low bar and watch while we exceed your expectations.”

She took a step toward and leaned her side against the wall. “Joking aside, I know Draco’s trying to be a better version of himself, but I’m not asking him to be a different person altogether. I fancy him because he’s him. Merlin, I fancied him despite reason when he was an absolute terror, so a little chafing with my friends isn’t exactly going to scare me off. Quite frankly, my friends can be pains in my arse, too, at times and well, Draco can’t bridge the distance on his own.”

“Well, Draco doesn’t know all of that.” Theo grimaced. “I think that he thinks one wrong move could bollocks everything up and send you running for the hills.”

“What’s it going to take to show him that’s not true?”

“Time,” Theo said. “After a while he’ll see you aren’t going anywhere.”

Reaching out, Hermione tugged on Theo’s sleeve until he took her hand, slotting their fingers together. “I’m not going anywhere, just so you know.”

“I know. And just so you know, Draco isn’t going anywhere either. He gets like this sometimes. Introspective. He’s still recovering from sharing a house with a mad man who watched his every move, even violated his mind a time or two. Draco had to learn to compartmentalize. He’s used to locking his thoughts and feelings away until he can process them when it’s safe to do so.”

She bit her lip. They were all still recovering in their own ways and would be for quite some time. Theo, too, but she’d wager her entire Gringotts vault he didn’t want to talk about his own personal traumas, namely his father, a veritable mad man himself. “I understand. I just feel awful. Draco wanted today to be special and it really tanked.”

“Not to be unerringly optimistic, but it could’ve gone worse.” Theo pulled on her hand, drawing her nearer until she was right in front of him, their fronts brushing. He dropped his hands to her hips. “Narcissa knows about us and approves. No one got hexed or spit on. There’s…room for improvement, granted, but I’d say it wasn’t a total failure.”

“You’re not wrong.” She sighed. “I just was hoping for a different outcome.”

Yes, she was supposed to be being patient while Draco wooed her, but that didn’t make everything off limits, right? There was plenty they could do—like what they’d done in the library—that would satisfy until whenever it was Draco was ready for more. Plenty she wanted to do, really. Merlin, when her friends coupled up, they couldn’t seem to keep their hands off each other, they were that insatiable. Was it so much to hope for that she could get off more than once in a week, other than by herself?

She was met with silence. When she looked up, Theo was studying her carefully. “What sort of outcome?”

Wasn’t it obvious based on what they’d discussed in the tea shop? Her cheeks prickled, and not from the blustery weather. “Theo, you know.”
His fingers bit into her hips as he leaned down. Instead of kissing her mouth he pressed his lips to the hinge of her jaw. Her lids fluttered shut, her teeth sinking into her lower lip as he dragged his mouth up and—she gasped. Theo had nipped the lobe of her ear and tugged, soothing the sting with a flick of his tongue. “I think you’ll need to be more specific. I’m not a mind reader, you know. Well, I could try my hand at legillmency, but that’s an entirely different matter, isn’t it?”

“You’re teasing me.” She groaned, squirming slightly in his hold.

His breath was hot against the side of her face. “If you want something, you need to learn to ask for it.”

She shivered at the way his voice had gone hot and picked up an authoritative edge that made her instantly flustered and turned on beyond her wildest belief, heat pooling between her thighs. She squeezed his arm, needing the support as she’d suddenly gone a little lightheaded. “Theo.”

One of his hands tangled in her hair, tugging enough to draw her head back so he could look her in the eye. His had darkened considerably. “Tell me.”

“I want—” He was holding her tight, one arm wrapped around her waist making it difficult for her to do little more than squirm. Her face was on fire, but there would be no way out of this other than honesty. “I want you to touch me.”

He released his hold on her hair and trailed his fingers down the side of her face, her neck, and smiled softly. For all the edge his voice possessed, his expression was achingly tender. “I am touching you.”

She groaned. “That’s not what I mean. You know that’s not what I mean.”

His hand was back in her hair, tugging once more, this time hard enough to make her scalp tingle and—a rush of wetness flooded her underwear. “Then tell me, Hermione.”

“I want to come,” she blurted, chest heaving against him as she panted, immeasurably aroused by the sound of his voice, at the command he’d issued. This was…unexpected.

Theo’s grip softened, his fingers massaging the back of her head. His smile grew, still tender, but wide, his dimple visible. “All you had to do was ask.”

Suddenly he was pulling her out of the courtyard, dragging her down a corridor to—he stopped in front of a door and opened it, nudging her inside the room with a press against the small of her back.

An empty classroom. Theo had brought her to a empty classroom where—

His mouth was on hers, his hands roaming, gripping at her jumper, squeezing her hips, walking her deeper into the shadowy room until her back hit the opposite stone wall not hard enough to hurt, but enough to make her gasp against his lips. He stole the chance to slip his tongue inside her mouth, brushing it against hers, coaxing it to tangle with his until she shifted against him, seeking friction, something more. He was hard, his erection pressing into her hip.

A moment later Theo tore his mouth away and she let her head back fall against the wall, panting, sucking much needed air into her lungs.

His hands which had been squeezing her bum circled around her body, dropping down to the waist of her trousers. With ease, he flicked the button and lowered her zipper before reaching back around where he yanked hard on her pockets, tugging her pants down until they rested just beneath
his rear.

His eyes flickered down to her light blue underwear covered core. He groaned gently, his expression pained. “Fuck, Hermione.”

She squirmed under his stare. “Theo, please.”

The sound of him swallowing, gulping, was loud in the small space. His fingers reached out, brushing against her slit through the soaked cotton of her knickers. She gasped softly.

“You want me to make you come?” Theo’s voice was liquid smoke.

She nodded frantically. “Please.”

His thumb pressed against her clit, drawing a gasp from between her lips. He smiled, delighted. “Say it.”

“I want you to make me come,” she whispered.

Under the waistband, his hand slipped. As soon as his fingers brushed her folds, he let loose a choking sound of disbelief. “You’re dripping, Hermione. How long have you been like this, love?”

She shuddered as his fingertips parted her folds, making her ache worse because he was right there but he wasn’t giving her what she wanted. “All week. I’ve been like this all week.”

She’d had to change her knickers twice most days.

Widening his stance to bring them closer in height, Theo dropped his forehead to hers, his fingers still exploring. His other hand cupped her jaw, the side of her neck. He hummed. “Since Draco made you come in the library? Greedy little thing, aren’t you?”

He smiled, making it obvious he didn’t really think she was.

She shook her head and tilted her hips, trying to urge him to touch her where she wanted, how she wanted. “Before. Since you kissed me. The second time.”

“Have you been thinking about it?” His fingers dipped low, to where all her wetness was coming from. Slowly, gently, he slipped the tip of his finger inside her. His eyes were locked on hers, watching, drinking in her most subtle, minute reactions to having him inside her. “Have you been thinking about what I told you, what I want to do with you?”

His finger slid deeper, just the one. It was enough to stretch her, his hands so much larger than her own, but it wasn’t enough to really push her limits.

“Yes.” She nodded. “I—oh, God.”

Theo had curled his finger, brushing the place she’d only ever been able to graze, but not fully reach, her arm and fingers too short, the angle never right. It provided her with the most delicious burst of pleasure, not dissimilar to having her clitoris rubbed, but deeper.

He repeated the move, fucking her gently, slowly, each time curling his finger and pressing, drawing increasingly desperate sounds from her mouth that made her sound wanton, embarrassingly so. He grinned. “Yeah? You’ve been thinking about me bending you over, fucking you witless? Turning that brilliant brain of yours off until all you can do is feel me fucking your tight little cunt? Making you writhe, making you beg for it?”
Her next gasp came out as a cry, nearly a sob. It was too slow, too much, not enough, his words so filthy and perfect as he stared at her like he wasn’t sure he wanted to wreck her or worship her.

She couldn’t speak. All she could do was squeeze his shoulders and hold on as he nudged her closer and closer to the brink.

“You want that, don’t you? The thought of it makes you drip, doesn’t it?”

It didn’t require an answer, not when the slick sound of his finger sliding into her was loud in the otherwise silent room.

Her lips trembled and the muscles in her abdomen burned. Her calves were a minute away from cramping as her toes curled inside her shoes. So close—

The heel of his hand brushed against her clit and pressed, sending her plummeting over the edge into pleasure so good, so sharp that when she finally stopped shaking, she could barely stand. Wrung out, she was exhausted and—Merlin, was it possible to get orgasm induced vertigo? Because the room was spinning.

“Are you all right?” Theo’s thumb brushed against her cheekbone, sweeping beneath her eye and gathering wetness of the pad of his finger. Apparently she’d been—well, not crying, but leaking tears.

A breathless laugh slipped from her mouth as her head lolled forward. “Am I? Yes, I’m—I’m wonderful.”

Theo chuckled and kissed her forehead. “You are wonderful. But it wasn’t…too much?”

“Yes.” At Theo’s frown, she hurried to clarify, “But the good kind of too much.”

His hand was still inside her knickers, his finger—he was still inside her. There wasn’t room for embarrassment at her words, not then when everything between them was so intimate.

Theo leaned back, looking her in the eye. His were dark pools of sapphire surrounded by an inky black ring. “I know I can be”—he cocked his head—“pushy.”

Pushy, yeah, but she’d never have expected him to be so dominant, let alone that the way he commanded her would get her so…hot. But it did, the mere thought of it making her spent inner muscles clench around his finger.

Theo’s brow rose, his lips pulling to the side in a smirk.

She shrugged weakly, a little sheepish. “I liked it. Clearly.”

Slowly, as if trying not to startle her or start something that might begin round two, Theo withdrew his finger from her core. She bit her lip to keep from whimpering at the loss.

“I’m glad. And I’ll remember that you do,” he said. “You will tell me if there’s something you don’t like, yes?”

It was difficult to imagine him doing something to her she didn’t enjoy, but she nodded. “Yes.”

Theo slipped his hand out of her knickers and brought it to his mouth. Eyes locked her face, he licked her wetness from his finger.

As exhausted as her orgasm had left her, the sight of Theo tasting her essence, his eyes going hazy
and his lashes fluttering against his cheek was almost enough to ramp her for another go. Almost.

Instead she reached down, tugging her trousers up her hips and buttoning them shut. Then she set her hands against Theo’s hips, her fingers dancing along the waist of his jeans until she reached the closure.

His hand snared her wrist, stopping her pursuit. “You don’t have to do that.”

She arched a brow. “I don’t have to do anything. I want to.”

A moment passed, Theo staring her down and her staring right back. Finally, he sighed shakily and dropped his hand. “Okay.”

If not for the fact that his hands were trembling slightly, she might’ve been offended by that. Okay. But when she lowered his zipper and slipped her hand inside his underwear, her fingers brushing the base of his cock, his whole body jerked. He chuckled. “Fuck.”

Biting her lip to keep from grinning too obviously, Hermione withdrew him from his undershorts and wrapped her fingers around his shaft and—Gods, her fingers barely met in a circle. That was—she’d think about that later. Now, she wanted to bring him as much pleasure as he’d brought her.

“Erm, do I just—” she ran her hand up his length, her fingers sweeping across his tip where a pearly drop of fluid was leaking from his slit. “Like this?”

His right hand wrapped around hers, squeezing until she gripped him tighter. His nostrils flared, his jaw clenched tight as he reached out, bracing himself with a hand against the wall to each side of her head. “Just like that. But I’m about a minute away from coming. Fair warning.”

He was hot beneath her fingers, his skin silky smooth and darker than the rest of him by several shades. It was mesmerizing, really, the feel of him, the way the breath puffed out from between his lips out each down stroke, whereas each time her fingers brushed the underside of his head he would hiss air in through his teeth. If she paid enough attention, his reactions were easily read, easily—

“Hermione, fuck”—his hips jerked, snapping, thrusting into her hand as his brow furrowed, eyes shut and his lips parted—“Hermione.”

Suddenly he was coming, spurts of white seed landing against the back of her hand, her jumper, his, most of it dripping down her knuckles and into the coarse dark hairs at the base of his cock. She continued to stroke him, stroking him through the pleasure until he reached down, grabbing her wrist gently and stopping her.

“Wow,” he breathed, eyes fluttering open.

She released his softening cock and kind of let her hand hover in the air since it was pretty well covered in come. “Was it…okay?”

Theo choked out a laugh. “Okay? Merlin, that’s the biggest understatement of the century. It was amazing. You were amazing.”

Her face heated, a faint warmth blossoming in her chest at the praise. His enthusiasm and appreciation were sweet, even if it was probably an exaggeration. For her first time giving a hand job, she’d done satisfactorily, bringing him off which was the end goal. But Theo had likely been bringing himself to orgasm since—when did boys start doing that? Years, he’d been doing it for years and no doubt he knew what he liked best. And then there was Draco who was no doubt quite
intimately acquainted with how Theo liked to be touched. Not to mention Draco had an edge, what with also being in possession of a penis and knowing what generally felt good. Amazing had to be embellishment.

But she’d made him come, and that was the whole point, wasn’t it? So yes, she’d take the praise and—well, she could only improve, right?

“Sixteen year old me would be well and truly dead right about now.” Theo chuckled.

She shook her head. “Why?”

“Because”—Theo withdrew his wand from the special side pocket of his jeans and cast a quick Scourgify on himself and then on her, vanishing the come from her hand and jumper—“the thought of something like this happening? It was basically what I wanked to half the time.”

Wait. “You thought about—with me?”

“Yes, with you.” Theo tucked his softened cock back into his shorts and pulled up his jeans. He glanced around the class, eyes lingering on the desk at the front of the room. “If I had one fantasy of having you in a classroom, I had a dozen.”

She stared at the desk, envisioning the scene he had described, and bit her lip. “A dozen, you say?”

“At least.” He reached out, thumb teasing her lip from between her teeth before kissing her. His lips were warm and soft, the kiss lacking the fevered heat that had brought them to the room, but all of the passion. When they finally broke away, Theo pulled her close with a hand buried in her curls, urging her to rest against his chest which she did. “A conservative estimate, really.”

Arms wrapped around his waist, she nuzzled her nose into his chest. He smelled like cloves and crisp air and the standard detergent the house elves used on all the laundry. She hummed contentedly before yawning loudly.

Theo chuckled, running his fingers over the back of her head, relaxing her further. “Tired?”

After the day they’d had, sleep sounded fantastic. She nodded.

“How about we head back to the dorms, rest, and then maybe I can tell you about what else I’d like to do with you in a classroom?”

Okay, maybe she was a little greedy. But if so? She was more than okay with it.

Chapter End Notes

I'm cleaning up the next chapter and I should have it posted shortly!

Again, thanks for reading! :)
Chapter Eleven

Chapter Notes

Hi guys! I’m posting not one, not two, but ~three~ chapters today *blows party horn*. No smut in this chapter, but there will be in the next two.

Enjoy!

By Monday morning, news of their relationship had spread throughout the castle. When it came time for Ancient Runes with Draco and Theo, she’d already received such a mixed bag of reactions ranging from glares to whispers to discomfiting looks of envy and awe that she was ready to call it a day and retreat to the privacy of her bedroom and it wasn’t even three o’clock. At least there had been no outright comments to her face, or—she shuddered—howlers. Thank Merlin.

The only other saving grace she’d been afforded was that Harry and Ron were getting their first taste of adventure as aurors, currently undercover on a mission to round up remaining Death Eaters who’d fled Britain. Rather soon for field work, but in his last letter Ron had written no guts, no glory.

Word of her relationship might’ve spread through the castle, but at least it hadn’t reached them. She wanted to be the one to let them know, she just hadn’t figured out how, or when.

Draco and Theo were already sitting at their shared table when she collapsed into her seat between them with a huff.

“Long day?” Theo asked.

He’d been in a better mood on Sunday, his flying session having apparently given him the time and space to work through that which had been bothering him. But she still wanted to talk, to let it be known in no uncertain terms that he didn’t need to be afraid of everything crashing and burning if he failed to get along perfectly with her friends from the word go.

She stretched her arms out in front of her and yawned. “The longest.”

Draco rested his leg against hers, hooking his foot around her ankle. “Did you want to cancel our meeting tonight?”

When it was the part of the day she looked forward to the most? Their group meetings obviously revolved around their runes project, but they were also her guaranteed time with them. “No. I’m fine, really. I skived off lunch, and that probably isn’t helping my energy.”

Draco reached into his bag and withdrew an apple. “To tide you over, then.”

“Thank you.” She smiled, fingers brushing against his and lingering as she took the proffered fruit.

Draco nodded, his eyes bright and smile fond.

Theo nudged her lightly. “If you don’t want to skip our meeting, would you rather have it somewhere more private? Our room?”
“That’s a brilliant idea.” She paused, brow rising. “As long as we actually get our work done.”

As long as they got their work done first.

Theo shot her a saucy grin that said he knew exactly what she was thinking. “Obviously.”

***

True to Theo’s word, they did accomplish their work, but the look in his eye that had promised a reward for finishing early? Well, she was honestly too knackered after the day she’d had. Instead of anything debauched happening, she was curled up in bed, her head pillowed on Draco’s chest and her fingers drawing runic patterns on his stomach while Theo lounged, propped against the footboard.

“I almost forgot,” she started. “The other day in Hogsmeade, Luna called us a coetus fidelium. I understand the translation, but I’ve never heard it before.”

Draco shifted slightly beneath her. “It’s an old term. Not so frequently used anymore.”

“A designation of sorts,” Theo added.

“What sort of designation?” she asked.

Draco cleared his throat. “A designation of one’s relationship. It puts a finer point on…this. What we are.”

“Though it can be as equally broad as it is specific,” Theo mused.

That sounded an awful lot like a riddle. “How do you mean?”

“It translates to faithful group, right? Which provides specificity in terms of the aspect of fidelity and wiggle room in terms of what constitutes a group,” Theo said.

Draco ran his fingers down the back of her arm, leaving a trail of gooseflesh in his wake. “Polyamory doesn’t necessarily imply faithfulness and polygamy is rather too specific, requiring marriage.”

She rolled slightly, propping herself up on her elbow so she could look at them both, brows arched. “And serious relationship didn’t quite cut it?”

Theo laughed. “Like Draco said, it’s an old term and not really in the vernacular of most Half-bloods and Muggleborns. I tend to forget Lovegood’s a Pureblood.”

“And she likely only used it because of who we are,” Draco added. “Theo and I. If anyone’s going to adhere to old customs, it would be those in the Sacred Twenty-Eight.”

Customs seemed to imply something more than a mere moniker. “What sort of customs?”

Draco opened his mouth, only to shut it, glancing meaningfully at Theo. She sat up more fully, intrigue making her perk.

Theo’s face ran through a funny gamut of expressions, grimacing lightly, arching his brows, seemingly struggling with what to say. Or maybe how to say it. “You have to have noticed by now that witches and wizards handle their romantic lives a little differently than Muggles. Particularly those raised with magic.”
As they had previously mentioned, the divorce rate was so low it was practically null, and marriages were taken quite seriously. But otherwise, nothing had seemed to contrast too differently with Muggle society. Students went on dates to Hogsmeade, flirted the same as anyone else. “How do you mean?”

Theo shot Draco a look before shrugging. “You’ve noticed everything is taken a bit more… seriously, no?”

Well…there was a degree of formality that colored most interactions, what with the dance lessons before the Yule Ball, the nearly stiff manner in which invitations to Hogsmeade were sometimes extended, occasionally by owl even if both students were sitting at the same dining table a few feet from one another. “Right…”

Draco sighed, the sound a touch exasperated. “There’s really no such a thing a casual relationship by wizarding standards, Hermione.”

“Of course there is,” she argued. “What was it you told me? Loads of people were shagging in fourth year?”


She *knew* that, obviously.

“To ask someone on a date is to offer your intent. You’re expressing a future wish for a relationship. And those are taken seriously,” Theo said.

But plenty of people dated around, broke up, made up. Like…there was…of course her mind had come up totally blank. Oh! “Ginny went out with Dean. And Harry went on a date with Cho. Your argument is flawed.”

“One date. There’s nothing wrong with testing the waters, but if a witch or wizard doesn’t see it going somewhere, why drag it out?” Draco said. “To go on more than three dates without offering the commitment of a relationship is rather…gauche now, and it used to be unheard of. For a wizard not to ask for a commitment by that point and yet to want to continue dating communicates a lack of respect. It would be wasting someone’s time and preventing them the freedom to find a more suitable partner or partners.”

Okay, so the Wizard World operated according to the 1950’s standard of *going steady*. What was the equivalent of getting pinned? Being given a golden snitch your beloved had caught? She had to bite her lip to keep from giggling.

“But sex *isn’t* taken as seriously?” she asked.

Draco shook his head. “If someone was led believe a relationship was in the cards and then were taken advantage of because of that implication, that would be viewed as quite an affront. But by itself, not inherently, no.”

And yet Draco was making her wait and they *were* in a relationship. She looked at him, eyes narrowed.

“Not inherently,” he repeated. The tips of his ears were pink. “Which isn’t to say it can’t be meaningful. Only that the two shouldn’t be confused, love and sex. They can be very much tied, or very much separate.”

“Just think, if witches and wizards were expected to wait, randy wizards would be jumping into ill-
thought marriages just to get their wands wet, so to speak. If you take away the temptation, normalize it, relationships and subsequently marriages are only entered into for the proper reasons. Factor in the whole bit about magical bonds, and *that* is why the divorce rate is also staggeringly low.”

“It’s interesting, really, because you’d think then that the average marrying age would be higher,” she said.

And it wasn’t. Most of her friends’ parents had married young, fresh out of Hogwarts, even. Her parents were *old* compared to her friends’ parents, really.

Draco shrugged. “It’s not that witches and wizards are desperate to marry.”

“Not at all,” Theo said.

“The mere decision to enter into a relationship isn’t taken lightly,” Draco said. “You wouldn’t agree to a relationship unless you were already serious in you affections.”

“So, unless they were someone you could see yourself…marrying?” she supplied.

Theo and Draco both nodded. Draco inclined his head. “Potentially.”

Merlin. No wonder Molly was so upset that she’d broken things off with Ron so shortly after having agreed to a relationship.

“So how does this tie into *old customs* if this is how the wizarding community at large still operates?”

“For one, Muggleborns and even some Half-bloods don’t all adhere to this,” Theo said. “They’re still more likely to be…casual.”

Because they wouldn’t know better in regard to these customs. She certainly hadn’t. Merlin, Hogwarts needed to offer a cultural elective. “Okay.”

Draco shifted atop the mattress, his expression a little uneasy. “Historically, Purebloods have treated courtship with an even greater degree of formality. It used to be de rigueur to send letters of intent to both the head of house and party in question before entering into an official courtship, though I think most have accepted that as a little *too* stodgy for these times. But there’s still a greater…*reverence* for courting rituals and relationships as whole and the formality is generally taken even more seriously when expressing a desire to bring someone else into an already established relationship. There’s a…an inherent risk that requires a certain degree of trust that is difficult to achieve if you aim to merely first *test the waters* with the new party.”

That made a lot of sense, actually. Draco and Theo were both already serious before she’d entered the picture. They had to trust each other immensely, had to know jealousy wouldn’t be an obstacle and that their own bond wouldn’t suffer by opening themselves up to a relationship with her. And conversely, they had to trust that she wouldn’t do something to damage, let alone sabotage the relationship they already had. The intent for something serious with her had to be present from the beginning. *All or nothing*, Theo had said.

And they’d just established relationships involved intent to one day…*oh*. Good Godric, by old standards was she somehow *engaged to be engaged*? Betrothed? Her feelings for them were strong, growing stronger by the day, but—

“I’m not getting married at nineteen,” she blurted.
Theo and Draco’s eyes went wide, jaws dropping.

“Who said anything about marriage?” Draco was staring at her she’d gone barmy.

Oh, Merlin. What had she done? She stared down at the bedspread. “This whole conversation, we’ve been talking about—about customs and intentions and how you don’t get into a relationship with someone unless you could see yourself—see it going somewhere, that somewhere being—”

Theo’s shoulders were shaking so hard the bed shook with him. She whipped around to Draco and—the bastard was grinning, his silver eyes gleaming and crinkled at the corners.

She grabbed a pillow and wacked them both in quick succession. “Are you both seriously making fun of me right now?”

Draco grabbed her wrist before she could smack him again. He tugged, pulling her across the bed when she landed in a heap atop his chest. He pressed a kiss to the center of her palm. “You’re sexy when you’re flustered, Granger. Why do you think I like arguing with you so much?”

“Sexier than normal, he means.” Theo waggled his brows and reached out, tickling the bottom of her foot lightly.

“Stop it.” She kicked at him and groaned, covering her face with one hand. “This is humiliating.”

“Hey, none of that.” Draco pried her hand from her face. “Don’t hide.”

That was exactly what she wanted to do, preferably bury herself somewhere no one could find her until the embarrassment wore off, or she perished. Whichever came first. Her galleons was on the latter.

“I wasn’t suggesting we would—” She groaned. That was exactly what she’d suggested because all the signs of their conversation had been pointing in that direction. She’d meant to communicate that she wasn’t ready for that now, but maybe that wasn’t what they wanted at all.

“It was rather presumptuous,” Draco mused, much to her renewed horror. “My mother’s an exceptional party planner, but to put together a wedding in under a year? There’s magic and then there are miracles.”

“Narcissa does love herself a challenge, Draco,” Theo drummed his fingers against his chin, the look on his face altogether contemplative.

She froze.

Theo dropped his hand back to her foot and pressed his thumb into the sole, no longer tickling, just providing perfect pressure. “Relax, Hermione. No one’s proposed. Yet.”

Her head was spinning. “So you’re saying…”

“Yes.” Draco nodded. The tops of his cheeks had turned a vivid shade of red. “Relationships are meant for getting to know someone, no different than amongst Muggles, only with the belief that there’s the potentiality of marriage. Not an assumption of such, just a mutual understanding and agreement that there’s a possibility so that everyone’s on the same page. So, one day, maybe.”

“Oh,” she breathed.
Theo cleared his throat. “Does that make you uncomfortable?”

Did it? She’d been focused for so long on what she believed she couldn’t have, that now that she had it, she hadn’t stopped to think about what keeping it looked like.

Before she knew it, they’d be sitting for their N.E.W.Ts and then—what then? She could get a job at the Ministry, or not, somewhere else maybe, probably, and Draco and Theo would—well, neither really needed to work, not with their amassed fortunes, but they probably would do something other than sit around, languishing in their manor homes and reveling in generations of accrued wealth. Hopefully.

But where would she live? Where would they live? Would they—Merlin, there were so many questions, so many details, but one thing stood out. She didn’t want to lose this, lose them, not now, not in a year. And considering she’d blurted that she didn’t want to get married at nineteen, not get married never, well…

“No.” She shook her head. “It doesn’t make me uncomfortable. It’s just…”

“Fast?” Theo smiled. “Like I said, no one’s proposed yet, Hermione.”

True. No one had even said the words I love you, yet. There was no need to think too far in the future. They’d cross those bridges as they came to them.

“I am serious about this,” she offered, blushing. For all her pouting about Draco wanting to romance her, it wasn’t just about sex for her. Not unlike wizarding custom dictated, she wouldn’t have agreed to entering into this relationship had she not been absolutely sure it was what she wanted, that they were who she wanted.

Just in case they worried she wasn’t after her minor panic, she wanted to assure them this wasn’t something she was taking lightly.

Draco lifted her hand to his lips, kissing each of her fingertips and melting her middle. “There’s no need to rush anything. I for one am rather pleased with the current state of our affairs.”

So was she.
Chapter Twelve

“Unfortunately,” Theo said upon her arrival in Ancient Runes the next week, “I won’t be able to meet tonight, or the rest of the week, actually.”

She spun on her stool, turning to look at him more fully. His face was drawn, tired in a way that spoke to a long day, not a night without sleep. There was tension around his mouth and between his brows, tension Theo didn’t usually carry. She shot Malfoy a worried look over her shoulder, only he was glowering at the desk. “What’s wrong?”

Theo looked at her from the corner of his eyes and bit out from behind clenched teeth, “Detention.”

Seriously? “For what?”

Theo blew out a breath, his cheeks puffing. “There was a bit of an…incident.”

Draco grumbled something beneath his breath that she couldn’t quite catch, but part of it sounded awfully vulgar.

She narrowed her eyes. Theo’s vague response—whereas he was usually the one to avoid beating around the bush— made her wary. “What sort of incident?”

Theo shifted uneasily on his stool. “A fifth year was acting out of line. I merely nudged him, well, back into line.”

Oh, that sounded decidedly not good. “What did you do, Theo?”

Draco practically growled, his grip on his quill so tight it might snap it he didn’t watch it. “Nothing I wouldn’t have done. I’d have done worse, honestly.”

“You couldn’t have done anything, Draco,” Theo hissed. “Not unless you wanted to violate your parole and wind up totally f*cked. They’ll throw you in Azkaban in a heartbeat if you even step one toe out of line and you know it. Which is why I handled it.”

“You think I don’t know that?” Draco threw his quill down. It skittered against the table and landed on the floor. “Of course I know that and it’s great feeling, let me tell you, feeling like an impotent f*ck-up.”

“Stop!” she shouted. Several students in the row in front of them turned, eyes curious. They quickly spun around when she glared. She dropped her voice. “Will one of you please tell me what happened?”

Theo sighed, shifting slightly to face her. He licked his lips. “A fifth year waste of breath in your house was making some rather…untoward comments about you in the courtyard. I told him if he didn’t stop talking shite, I’d see to it that would be all he could do. I gave him fair warning and yet chose to stay the course.”

She could feel the blood drain from her face. “So you…?”

Theo smiled sardonically. “Little twist on the good ol’ slugulus eructo. He’ll be perfectly fine after a dose of prune juice. Administered rectally, of course, seeing as his mouth is rather occupied. That should work the curse right out of his system, otherwise it wears off in two hours”
“Theodore,” she hissed. The boy would be vomiting…good grief. That was, well, inspired, really. But wrong, not to mention disgusting. “I’m not going to bother asking what you were thinking, because you clearly weren’t. Good grief, you could’ve gotten yourself expelled.”

“Well I didn’t. Though I likely have the Headmistress to thank for that. She’s the one that…intervened. Overheard most of what happened, too.”

Draco cracked the knuckles of his left hand and huffed. “McGonagall should’ve awarded you points for not permanently maiming the gormless twat.”

While she hadn’t heard anything outright, there were some students who clearly disagreed with her choice of companionship if the glares they shot her meant anything. She’d brushed it off, but apparently whatever this particular housemate of hers had said had sent Theo over the edge. “What did he say?”

Theo shook his head, jaw tense. “Tell me.”

“He called you a Death Eater whore, Hermione.” Draco was all but vibrating with unreleased rage, but his voice was oddly even, restrained.

She swallowed over the growing lump in her throat. “Oh. Well, I guess it could’ve been worse.”

Theo snorted, unamused. “He did say worse. That was just the gist of it.”

Worse? Maybe she didn’t want to know.

She took a deep breath and reached out, squeezing Theo’s arm. “As misguided as your approach might’ve been, I appreciate you…defending my honor. But really, I can do that myself.”

Draco snorted and brought a hand up, brushing the bridge of his nose. “And you don’t need magic, either.”

She nudged him lightly with her elbow.

“I’m not going to apologize.” Theo sighed. “What’s done is done. I’ll…try to keep a better handle on my temper and—yeah, no, I can’t promise not to do it again, Hermione. But I swear I’ll try harder not to get caught.”

She rolled her eyes. Men. “So, McGonagall gave you detention?”

He nodded glumly. “I have to scrub out the Quidditch shower stalls. Magic not permitted.”

Ew. “Every day this week?”

It was only Wednesday.

“Apparently it’s going to take me that long,” Theo grimaced. “But you both should still meet up. Just skip my sections of the translation and I’ll work on them this weekend.”

***

Maybe it was because of what had happened earlier that day, but Draco stiffly took a seat in front of her that evening at the Gryffindor dining table, something neither he nor Theo had done before.
Ginny, seated at her left, harrumphed loudly. “Are you lost, Malfoy?”

“Kind of you ask”—A plate appeared in front of him and he began carefully filling it with roasted chicken and carrots—“but no.”

“Then can you get lost?” Ginny sneered.

Hermione elbowed her sharply. “Be nice.”

“This is me being nice.”

Draco set his fork down and leaned in, elbows perched on the edge of the table. “Listen here, Weasley, I don’t particularly like you and it’s clear you don’t like me, either. But we have something in common”—his eyes flashed to hers—“so I’d like to propose a truce. I’ll keep my opinions on how atrocious I find the color of your hair to myself, and you can keep—

“How I think you’re a poncy arse?” Ginny scoffed.

“—to yourself and we can enjoy a tenuous peace. I’ve had a foul day and the only thing I want to do is have dinner with Hermione.”

With Theo serving detention, there was likely no one in his house he’d want to share dinner with anyway. Few Slytherins in their year had returned, and of those who had, even fewer were speaking to Draco.

Ginny chewed on that, glowering silently at him across the table. After a fraught moment of silence, she lifted her chin. “Favorite Quidditch team?”

Draco cut his eyes. “Falmouth Falcons.”

She rolled her eyes up to the ceiling and shook her head. “Fine. Truce.”

Hermione arched a brow. “What kind of test was that?”

“What else are Malfoy and I meant to discuss, if not Quidditch?” She pushed her plate aside. “His hair products?”

“Why, are you in need of recommendations?” Draco smirked. “Might I start by suggesting some dye?”

The rest of the meal went rather smoothly, if not a bit stiffly, but no hexes were uttered, another win. They parted ways a bit awkwardly, Ginny off to Gryffindor tower, while Draco held her back, lingering by a column just outside the Great Hall.

“How would you mind going back to mine? I’d really rather work with a modicum of privacy tonight if it’s all the same to you. I’m not really in the mood for people.” Draco said.

She nodded, taking his hand and allowing him to lead her off in the direction of the dungeons.

He remained tense, even once they were cloistered away in the privacy of his room. Too tense.

She put her hand atop his, keeping his book shut. He sent her a look of confusion. She shrugged. “How about we take the evening off from the project?”

“Hermione Granger,” he drawled, a small smile tugging at his lips. “Are you suggesting we skive off work?”
“We are ahead. You realize most groups haven’t even finished half of their translation? We’re on track to finish long before it’s due next month.” She nudged the book, urging him to set it aside. “I think we could skive off the rest of the week and we’d be fine.”

Draco took the hint, twisting around to set the book on his nightstand. He shifted, propped slightly by the pillows at the top of his bed. “How do you suggest we spend our evening, then?”

There was a subtle implication to his words that made her bite the inside of her cheek.

It was usually the three of them, and for some reason, neither Theo nor Draco had seemed inclined to initiate more than a kiss when they were all together. Whether it was because they weren’t interested in doing more than that together, or they didn’t want to overwhelm her, she wasn’t entirely certain.

Not that nothing had happened between her and Draco since the library, no. Last week she’d run into him in the fifth-floor corridor outside the charms classroom, an area of the castle infrequently traversed during mid-day. On her way to spend her free block in the library, she’d changed course, tugging Draco into a broom cupboard where she’d given him a rather impromptu hand job. He’d gripped her hips so hard upon coming that she’d actually bruised, not that she’d minded. Especially not when, after he’d recovered, he had brought her off with his hand up her skirt and his mouth latched on to the thin, sensitive skin of her neck.

Other than that, she’d resolved to follow Draco’s lead and not push, simply enjoying what they were. And if she was masturbating twice some days, well.

But after the day they’d had? For all she wanted him, she really wasn’t about to press the issue. Sure, an orgasm might’ve blown off some steam, relaxed them both, but she knew he wanted their first coupling to be special.

Which was why she pushed on his arm, urging him to roll onto his side. He looked rather confused, his brow furrowed, but he did as she prodded. She snuggled up at his back, her knees tucked behind his, and wrapped an arm around his middle. “Let’s just lie here for a bit.”

Draco chuckled and shook his head before wiggling, rolling over and shifting her in his arms until he was the one holding her with his chin tucked against the top of her head. “Much better.”

Cuddled up, the tension slowly bled from Draco’s muscles. Topic to topic they bounced, discussing anything and everything, some topics heavier than others. In a stiff voice, she shared that her parents were still in Australia, no longer obliviated but very cross with her, their relationship strained because they couldn’t wrap their heads around the severity of a war they knew nothing of, nor the lengths she’d been willing to go to keep them safe. Draco had gone still, quiet, and in a whisper he’d confessed that she’d done the right thing. His words had carried a weight, an implication that she’d saved their lives, just as she’d feared.

He talked about pursuing a potions mastery and maybe putting some of the Malfoy money to good use, maybe improving upon and producing potions to sell at a lower cost. His mother was proud, and when Hermione had asked what his father thought of his plans, he confessed that he hadn’t spoken to his father since his sentencing.

There were parts of Lucius he hated, but also parts he loved, happy memories he couldn’t just forget. It tore him, the dissonance, loving someone and hating things about them, hating that you loved them despite the parts you hated. It was complicated, his voice cracking as he explained the best he could, and she understood, wouldn’t ask him not to love his father, but he told her in no uncertain terms that if it came down to his father or her, there was no choice.
His answer would be her.

They didn’t linger over the events of the day, but she didn’t let him wallow in the anger and self-loathing that the prattish fifth year’s slurs toward her had inspired in him. She didn’t care what people thought of her, she told him, not much anyway. She’d more than done her duty, sacrificed most of her childhood to fight a war that should never have been the responsibility of children to fight. Not to mention, too many people she loved had made the ultimate sacrifice for her and others like her to live, to prosper, and she wasn’t going to squander that by living a half life. It was time she did more than try to survive.

If it came down to public opinion of her, or being with who she wanted, there was no question. Her answer would be them.

Hours they talked, until eventually Theo slipped into the room, exhausted from scrubbing the grime from the Quidditch showers. Draco, loose-limbed and bleary-eyed, had kissed her goodbye, and Theo had done the same before falling into bed in the space she’d previously occupied.

***

On Friday, Draco once again led her down to his room, her Thursday evening having been occupied with Head Girl duties and rounds.

She entered his room first and made her way to the bed where she dropped her bag to the floor. Draco’s arms circled her waist before she could retrieve her books, and pressed a kiss to the side of her neck.

Shutting her eyes, she tilted her neck and offered him up more of her neck to kiss.

“It’s Friday.” He brushed his lips against the sensitive skin just beneath her ear.

She hummed. “It is.”

His tongue flicked out, toying with her earlobe and making her gasp sharply into the quiet of the room. His arms, banded around her waist, tightened. “You could stay the night. If you wanted.”

Her eyes popped open. Stay? As in, sleep over, in his and Theo’s room, in their bed? “I could?”

He hummed, continuing to press slow, open-mouthed kisses to her neck.

She bit her lip and squirmed slightly in his hold, not trying to break free but—his mouth on her neck was arousing, making her hot and parts of her ache. She wanted to, oh did she want to fall asleep in his arms and wake up the same, but it would be torture, keeping her hands to herself for a whole night.

Not that she didn’t possess self control, but tell that to her libido in the middle of the night when she’d woken up nights prior, rocking into her mattress, dripping down her thighs after a particularly vivid dream. “I don’t know if that’s such a good idea, Draco.”

His grip on her loosened as he pulled away, his mouth leaving her neck. He tugged slightly, shifting her to face him. A frown creased his face. “Why not?”

Merlin, he wanted to hear her say it? “You said you wanted to woo me.”

One pale brow flicked upward. “I said that. Yes.”
So it probably wasn’t a good idea to tempt her with something she wasn’t meant to have yet. “So I don’t want to do something to…jeopardize that.”

She worried her lip as she soon as she made her confession.

Slowly his frown disappeared, his lips twitching into a small smile as he stared down at her. “Did you want the rose petals after all?”

Did she—oh.

Draco’s smile grew as realization dawned on her. “Did you? Want to stay, I mean. Because I suppose I could transfigure a few napkins into petals if you’re really—”

She surged forward, kissing him quiet because yes she wanted to stay. Good Godric did she ever.

He grinned against her mouth and brushed his hands up her arms where he tugged against her robes. “May I take these off?”

She nodded, holding still while Draco slipped his fingers under the heavy fabric of her outerwear and let the cloth slide down her arms, pooling at the floor. “Yours, too.”

He shrugged out of his robes, leaving him in his button-down and trousers, and her in a shirt and skirt, both still wearing their shoes and ties.

When she reached out to loosen his tie, her hand was trembling and she wasn’t really sure why. She wanted this but now that it was happening, however slowly it was happening, her stomach was suddenly full of flapping pixie wings.

Draco noticed, he must’ve, because he helped, aiding her trembling fingers and tossing his tie down beside them. The entire time his eyes were locked on hers, a small smile lighting up his face.

He didn’t let her get any further with undressing him. With an enviably steady hand, he cupped her jaw and tilted her face up, leaning down and kissing her once more.

She let herself get lost in it, the feeling of his soft, warm lips moving against hers, his tongue gently sweeping against the seam of her mouth, begging entrance. His fingers gripped her waist and he stepped into her, pressing his body against hers, letting her feel him, feel that he was already hard against her hip, wanting her just as badly as she wanted him.

He sucked her lower lip into his mouth, teeth nipping, and she crushed herself closer, but it wasn’t close enough. She couldn’t get close enough, her hips rocking into his with sudden desperation.

Draco broke away, panting heavily. His lips were swollen and red, his eyes hazy and dark. “Slow down, Hermione. I’m not going anywhere.”

“Sorry.” She laughed, breathless. “I’m, erm, a little—”

“Eager?” He grinned.

“That.” She licked her lips, heat pooling between her thighs as Draco’s eyes tracked the move. “And I’m a little nervous.”

He tore his gaze from her mouth, staring at her sharply. “We don’t have to do this. We can just—”

“No!” She shook her head. “I want to, I really want to. I just—”
She’d spent so much time imagining this that she was—

“You’re over thinking it?” It was as if he’d read her mind.

She nodded, worrying her lip. This wasn’t something she could prepare for, study, not in any practical capacity. She’d filled in the blanks with too many thoughts of her own. Her thoughts had snowballed and she hadn’t meant for this, her first time, to become a thing and now suddenly it was.

Draco brushed a curl from her face and tucked it behind her ear. “I want it to be good for you.”

“For you, as well,” she insisted.

“It’s going to be good for me no matter what,” he swore, blushing a bit. “Can you just—trust me? Can you just relax and let me make it good for you, too?”

That was asking a lot. Not the trusting him bit, no, but asking her to just let him handle things. She couldn’t remember the last time—if ever—that she’d willingly given up control. Well, come to think of it, she’d let Theo take the reins that day in the classroom after their trip to Hogsmeade and that had been an experience so…

As soon as she nodded, his mouth was on hers, his knees knocking into her legs as he walked her backward. The backs of her knees hit the bed and she tumbled down on to it, Draco leaning down over her, holding himself aloft as she quickly shucked her shoes and socks and wiggled closer to the head of the bed.

“You’re gorgeous, you know that?” he whispered. “Cheeks flushed and your hair all wild, splayed out on the pillow. I’m so bloody lucky.”

She bit her lip, squirming slightly under the praise.

Draco sat back on his haunches, kneeling between her thighs. Her skirt had slipped, pooling around her hips. He placed a hand on the skin at the outside of her knee and slid it upward, under her skirt and around to her bum, which he squeezed lightly. She shifted, wanting more of his touch, all over.

“So are you,” she muttered.

He grinned. “You think I’m hot, Granger?”

She rolled her eyes. “You know I find you attractive.”

He pulled his hand out from under her skirt and reached for her tie, unknotting it with steady, nimble fingers. He let it lay loose around her neck, and began undoing the buttons of her shirt. Her breath quickened.

“Do you think about me when you…”

She swallowed as her shirt parted down the middle, only a few buttons holding it closed. “When I what?”

From beneath his lashes, Draco glanced up at her face. “When you touch yourself?”

Her chest was splotchy, her stomach, too as an entire center strip of skin down her torso was revealed, her shirt totally unbuttoned. She gripped the sheets at her side and nodded. “Yes.”

Why bother lying when it was true? She did think about him, thought about him, about Theo,
Merlin they were all she thought about, all she had thought about for years.

Draco slipped his fingers under her shirt and slid the sides apart, revealing her plain, pink bra. His jaw clenched, eyes darkening. “Tell me about it.”

“About—touching myself?”

He reached up, brushing his fingers against the bottom swell of her breasts, again, just over where the thin cotton cups covered her nipples. She bit her lip, chest heaving. “What do you think about? What do you think about me doing?”

“This.” She blushed. “And you kissing me.”

Draco leaned in, kissing the side of her neck, her throat, his lips hot and damp. She arched into it and he hummed. “What else?”

“Erm.” Her thoughts were fuzzy, going hazy around the edges as Draco slipped his hands around her shoulders and urged her to lean forward. Off her shirt went, tossed across the room. “Touching me.”

His hands slipped under her back, flicking the clasp of her bra. That too wound up on the other side of the room, forgotten completely when Draco trailed his mouth down her chest, pressing a trail of wet kisses to her skin that led to the peak of her left breast. His lips wrapped around her nipple, sucking, tugging with his teeth until it pebbled. He pulled back and blew on it, the sudden rush of cool air making her gasp and reach out, burying her hands in his hair.

He switched sides, giving the other half of her chest the same treatment. His tongue flickered out, toying with the bud, his fingers pinching the other slightly. She squirmed beneath him. “Draco.”

“Like this?” He was staring up at her, watching. “Touching you like this?”

She nodded.

“Is that all you think about?”

She shook her head.

“Keep going,” he urged, pinching her nipple harder, making her jerk. A rush of wetness slipped out of her, soaking into the cotton of her knickers, making the inside of her thighs damp.

She squirmed, hips rocking, seeking friction, but he was too far away, holding himself out of reach above her. “I think about you touching me like you did in the library.”

Draco trailed his hand down her abdomen, the calluses of his fingers leaving a trail of heat everywhere he touched. He tucked them beneath the waistband of her skirt and tugged, yanking the fabric over her hips and down her thighs and calves. She was naked save for her white cotton underwear, underwear Draco was staring at, his lips parted, the expression on his face awed.

“Touch me,” she begged, in part because she was embarrassed and also because the way he was looking at her had ignited a desire within her that made her dizzy with desperation. She shifted, arching her back, her hands once again clutching the sheets. “Please.”

A choked sound slipped from between his lips as he dropped down, kissing her tummy just beneath her naval. He kissed her again, lower, until his lips brushed the band of her knickers. His fingers tucked into the fabric and he glanced back at her face. “May I?”
She nodded and lifted her bum, helping him remove her knickers.

Then she was naked, totally starkers, lying in his bed, panting, dripping wet and aching.

And he was staring.

“Draco.”

He snapped out of it, bringing his hands to her hips and leaning back in, pressing his lips to the last place he’d kissed, not far from her core. His mouth trailed lower until—

“What are you doing?” She reared up on her elbows, staring down at where he was crouched between her legs.

Draco lifted his head and licked his lips, making her insides clench. “Kissing you?"

It was her turn to stare.

He chuckled darkly, hands roaming up the inside of her thighs, parting her legs further, opening her up and—oh my God, her face was on fire and so were his eyes. “Cunnilingus, Hermione. Unless you’re opposed, I’m planning on making you come on my tongue.”

She flopped back against the mattress and covered her face with her hands. Good Godric.

“Are you opposed?”

She dropped her hands and shook her head. “No.”

“Do you want me to make you come with my mouth?” His smirk was positively sinful, lifting the left corner of his mouth, the mouth he wanted to use to bring her off. The mouth she wanted him to use to bring her off.

She swallowed and nodded. “Yes. I—I want that.”

Draco didn’t draw out his gentle teasing. He lowered himself back between her thighs until he was lying on his stomach, and hooked her knee over his shoulder. Both his hands went to her core, his thumbs parting her lower lips as he leaned in and—

“Oh my God,” she gasped, neck arching against the bed at the first swipe of Draco’s tongue through her folds.

His breath was hot, his tongue even hotter as he kissed her cunt.

“Draco,” she panted his name, fingers clenched tight in the sheets.

Of all the ways to respond, he hummed, the vibration of his voice shooting straight through her. She released the sheets, grabbing his hair, needing something to hold on to in order to keep from flying apart. Who knew where she’d land.

Draco replaced his tongue with a finger, sliding one long digit inside of her. She was so soaked with arousal and his spit that he slid inside with ease. He added another, stretching her slightly, her walls giving way but gripping him tight.

A gasp tore itself from her throat when he flicked his tongue against her clit, her nerves already on edge, sensitive. His free hand reached up, splaying against her belly, holding her still and keeping her from thrashing too wildly as he fastened his mouth over her nub and sucked. She glanced down
and—he was staring up at her, his silver eyes locked on her face as he devoured her like she was
the last meal he’d ever eat.

Pressure built in her core, swelling, a thread inside her drawing tighter and tighter.

Draco’s tongue flicked rapidly against her, his fingers thrusting lightly into her, curling and—

Her fingers tightened in his hair and she bit down hard on her lip as she cried out, the thread within
her snapping and her orgasm suddenly on top of her, stealing the breath from her lungs and making
them bloody burn. “Draco.”

He continued to lap at her until it became too much. She tugged on his hair and he pulled back,
sliding his fingers out of her. His face was flushed, no doubt like hers, but his eyes were bright and
his lips and chin wet with her juices.

“Oh my God,” she breathed.

Draco grinned, that stupidly talented tongue of his licking his lips, licking her wetness from his
mouth, tasting her. “Good?”

If she wasn’t feeling absolutely boneless and her muscles jelly, she’d have rolled her eyes.
Obviously. “Uhuh.”

He chuckled, prowling up her prone form, a hand on either side of her head, his face hovering over
hers. “I have a new life goal.”

She hummed.

“Spend as much time as possible with my face between your thighs.” He dropped his face, kissing
her and—she could taste herself on his lips, tangy and musky and really not bad at all.

It was...hot. Despite having just come, more wetness seeped out of her slit.

Draco pulled back, once more swiping his tongue out against his lips, capturing her essence.

“A worthy goal.” She sighed, shifting, stretching beneath him. “I wouldn’t say no. I also wouldn’t
say no to you removing some of your clothing. All of your clothing.”

He was still dressed, still even wearing his loafers. She was no expert, but having sex would
probably work much easier if they were both naked.

Draco nodded and drew back, crawling gracefully off the side of the bed. His hand went to the top
button of his shirt, but he didn’t undo it. He stood there, eyes rounding and looking a touch
panicked. Not exactly a look she wanted to see on his face ever, but certainly not then.

“What’s wrong?” She sat up, shivering slightly. The room was a touch cool, the dungeons lower in
temperature than elsewhere in the castle. And now she didn’t have Draco’s warmth on her, near
her.

His throat worked through a swallow, bobbing. He shook his head, fingers dropping from his
buttons, his eyes looking anywhere and everywhere but at her. “Maybe I shouldn’t.”

Shouldn’t—what? Remove his clothing? Why wouldn’t he—

Oh. Her eyes flashed down to his left arm and back to his face. He’d gone ashen, like he hadn’t
considered that all of this, having sex, would mean taking off his shirt and revealing his mark.
To tread carefully, or not? Split the difference? She took a deep breath. “It’s just a scar, Draco.”

He flinched.

“It’s not.” He grabbed the collar of his shirt and tugged it down, revealing the start of the thick band of white twisted flesh that marred his chest. *Sectumsempra.* “This is just a scar. This?” He held out his arm. “This is wrong and I don’t want it to have a place here.”

“Then don’t give it one.” She reached out, seizing his hand. “We both have scars.”

Draco flinched, his eyes flashing down to her bare forearm, the crude letters standing out in stark, red relief against her skin. “You have scars because you fought and you survived.”

“And you didn’t?” She knelt against the edge of the bed and reached for his topmost button. He held still, letting her undo his buttons, revealing more of that jagged scar that cut across his well-muscled chest. By the time she slipped the last button through its hole, he was trembling slightly. The shaking worsened when she tugged the shirt off his shoulders and down his arms, the fabric fluttering to the ground. She grabbed his hand and flipped it palm side up, revealing the inside of both their arms. “Your aunt did this to me, marked me. Your mark isn’t any different.”

“I asked for this,” he croaked, voice cracking.

“Under duress.” She lifted her fingers, gently tracing the black lines, holding him still when he jerked. “I don’t think any less of you because of what you did to survive, to save the people you love.”

Draco’s jaw shifted forward and back, his teeth grinding as he blinked hard and fast. “Hermione.”

He sounded so desperate, something inside her broke in answer. She surged up, kissing him, swallowing the choked sounds that slipped from his lips, soothing him the best way she knew how. He kissed her back, desperate, hungry, biting her bottom lip, soothing the sting with a swipe of his tongue until she was clinging to him, arms around his shoulders and breasts smashed against his bare chest, her knees quivering against the bed.

When he pulled back, gasping for breath, she trailed her mouth down his jaw, pressing kisses to his neck and lower, to the start of his scar. He cupped the back of her head and tugged gently against her hair.

“Sorry,” he murmured.

“For what?”

He looked as if she’d lost her mind. “We were going to…”

She frowned. “Are we not?”

His brow furrowed. “You still want to?”

Unequivocally. “Don’t you?”

He huffed out a quiet laugh, his gaze darkening once more as his eyes roved over her body. Her very much still naked body. He swallowed. “I don’t think there will ever be time when I don’t want to. I always want you.”

Warmth spread from her chest downward. “You have me.”
His silver eyes locked on hers. “I haven’t had you yet.”

She shivered, grabbing his arms to balance. “Well. Are you going to get on with it?”

Draco barked out a laugh. “Bossy, are we?”

The muscles beneath her palms bunched as he pressed against her hips, urging to lie back down. As soon as she did, his fingers dropped to the button on his trousers, swiftly popping it and lowering the zipper. He shucked the fabric down his hips and over his thighs, muscles toned from years of Quidditch. Left in only his undershorts, a pair of navy boxer-briefs that left little to the imagination, Draco kneeled his way back onto the bed. He grabbed the topmost corner of the covers and tugged.

Lifting up, she let Draco pull the sheet down. He settled in beside her and tucked the covers around them, cocooning them in the warm bedding that smelt a bit like him and Theo both, the comforting scent of cloves lingering around them.

Draco reached between her thighs, thighs she readily parted, and slipped two fingers back inside her, his thumb brushing her clit. He dropped a kiss to the center of her chest. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

Was he was speaking about this being her first time, or something else? She spread her thighs further and gasped when he touched that place inside her that sent flickers of electricity racing up her spine. “I trust you.”

In short order, Draco brought her back to the edge, his fingers playing her easily until, even muffled by the comforter pulled around them, she could hear his fingers sliding through her arousal, everything between her thighs slick. He flicked her clit and her stomach tensed, muscles locking as she cried out and came around his fingers.

Draco kissed her temple, her skin slightly damp with sweat, and smiled down at her. His erection had abated during the reveal of his mark, but he was hard again, his cock pressing against her thigh. She wiggled, arching against it, biting back a smile when his eyes slammed shut and his breath stuttered through his lips.

“Are you sure?” he asked upon opening his eyes. He was watching her face, staring at her, as if wanted to see the truth in her eyes and not just her words.

She nodded. “Quite sure.”

With a deep breath, Draco shucked his shorts and reached for his wand. He cast the contraceptive charm they’d all been taught back in third year and then set his wand aside before crawling between her legs.

“You’ll tell me if you want to stop,” he instructed. “Or if something hurts. Or even if just don’t like ___”

“Draco.” She rested her hand on the side of his face, fingers carding through the soft strands at his temple. “Get on with it.”

He nodded, just once, a restrained dip of his chin.

The covers around them slipped down to the small of his back as he shifted forward, his cock nudging her slit. She took a deep breath and rested her knees against his waist and her hands on the back of his neck, touching his shoulders, soaking up the warmth of his skin as he pressed slowly inside her.
Despite his thorough preparation, the initial intrusion pinched. Just a bit and only at first as the flared head of his cock entered her, parting her walls for the first time. Draco froze, eyes locked on her face. “Are you okay?”

It…burned a little, but she breathed through it. She nodded and swallowed. “Keep going.”

He slid deeper inside her and the slight twinge of pain abated, replaced with a foreign fullness. It wasn’t unpleasant, just…a little odd.

Fully seated within her, Draco paused once more. His jaw was like granite, smooth and sharp, and his nostrils were flared slightly. His eyes…Merlin, his heavy lidded eyes were locked on her, looking like he was in some sort of exquisite pain and loving it. He was beautiful and if nothing else came from this, her chest squeezed at the mere thought of giving him pleasure, of him falling apart because of her, falling apart inside of her.

Beneath her hands, his shoulders trembled from holding himself still. She smiled, blushing a bit even though it was silly. But she’d never been so intimately joined with another person, and for all that it was foreign and full and a little odd, she really liked how close he was. “Hi.”

Draco dropped his forehead to hers and chuckled just once, broken, breathless. “Hey.”

She bit her lip. “You can move. It doesn’t hurt anymore.”

He nuzzled the tip of his nose against hers. “You’re certain?”

“Positive.” She nodded.

Keeping their faces close, Draco withdrew his cock slowly until just the head of him was still buried inside her. Watching her carefully, he pressed back in, not quite thrusting, a more gentle intrusion that allowed her to better acquaint herself with the way her walls parted, taking him in.

A stuttered breath slipped from his lips, warming her face. “Talk to me.”

“I’m, erm—I like this. Being this close,” she whispered.

Draco’s brow furrowed. He swallowed audibly and nodded.

Most women didn’t orgasm their first time, she knew that, just like she knew most women also didn’t orgasm from vaginal penetration alone. She really wasn’t disappointed that there weren’t fireworks bursting behind her eyes, not when he’d already brought her off twice, once with his mouth and again with his hand. And she really did like it. The intimacy was unlike anything she’d experienced, watching Draco’s face shift in pleasure, his eyes flashing hot and bright as he stared down at her, his breath sweet and warm as it fanned against her face.

It was nice, tender, and sweet, and—

Draco tilted her hips upward, just slightly, and his next gentle thrust prodded her front wall, drawing a gasp from her lips so loud that they both froze.

He smiled, small and private and so pleased. “There?”

She nodded so hard she probably resembled a bobblehead. “Do that again.”

He nodded, withdrawing his cock and thrusting back in, a little quicker. He nudged that spot again, this time a little harder, and her vision crossed it was that good.
“Like this?” Draco asked, hips rocking in a steady rhythm that had her trembling under him.

_Exactly_ like that…only maybe… “Harder?”

Keeping her hips tilted, Draco thrust with a bit more force, hips snapping. A desperate keen clawed its way up her throat. Draco’s eyes darkened at the sound, an answering growl slipping from his lips as he continued to thrust into her perfectly.

Sweat broke out along her neck and in the space between her breasts. Without faltering, Draco dropped his head to her chest and captured a nipple between his teeth, tugging on it lightly. A thread of pleasure rippled from her breast to her core, nudging her closer, making her throb and Draco groan as her insides fluttered.

He raised his head and dropped his forehead back down to hers. His skin was flushed and dotted with perspiration, too, his fair hair damp around his temples and at the nape of his neck. “Are you close?”

She made a noise, a little choked gasp that hopefully he counted as an affirmative and rocked her hips, meeting his thrusts the best she could when any second it felt like she was going to fall apart.

Draco seemed to get it because he kept going, didn’t stop. Instead he slid one hand between their bodies, just above where they were joined, and pressed his thumb against her clit.

It was like he’d cast a *bombarda* or Merlin, a *confringo*. For the briefest moment everything inside her locked tight, before shattering, sending her to shaking, gasping pieces in Draco’s arms. Even her vision went dark, or maybe she’d shut her eyes, she wasn’t sure, only that she was flying apart and that parts of her were rearranging, torn apart and stitched back together with each snap of Draco’s hips.

Above her Draco’s breath caught in his throat. His hips stuttered, his thrusts slightly slowed by the way she was gripping him without meaning to, without being able to help it. He gave one, two, three more thrusts before he sobbed her name and gripped her hips so tight she’d likely bear finger-shaped bruises once again.

She came back to Earth by small measures. Her muscles unclenched, her curling toes relaxing, and her back melting into the mattress more fully. Her racing heart slowed, her gasping, dizzying breaths returning to normal.

A moment later lips pressed against her forehead and she opened her eyes, blinking away tears, not from pain but from being so bloody wrung out. Draco was smiling down at her, his own eyes a little dazed, but soft, the expression on his face altogether reverent, worshipful.

“Hey,” he whispered.

She swallowed, her voice a little scratchy from all that panting. “Hi.”

“Are you all right?”

She nodded and lifted a hand to brush to his fringe from his eyes. “That was—wow.”

He grinned, looking inordinately pleased. “Yeah? Good?”

_Good?_ She’d come so hard she’d seen constellations.

Suddenly Draco was laughing, body shaking, doing really funny things to her where they were still
joined, his cock softening inside her. “Constellations?”

Oh, Merlin. She’d said that out loud?

He kissed the tip of her nose, still grinning. “I’m glad. I’m only laughing because of the irony. Constellations. Draco.”

Hermione rolled her eyes, but couldn’t help but smile. He had a point. “It was perfect.”

Draco captured her mouth in an unhurried kiss that, despite the absolute exhaustion and fatigue of her muscles, made her toes curl.

With one more quick press of his lips to hers, Draco leaned back, his cock slipping from her. Her lashes fluttered. Another foreign sensation, a flood of wetness seeped from her cunt, not all of it hers.

Draco glanced between their bodies, his mouth immediately twisting in a grimace.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, stomach clenching.

He shook his head. “Nothing. I just—it looks like you bled a bit.”

Oh. She lifted up, following his gaze to where a smear of red blood stood out against the pale pink skin of his cock.

Draco grabbed his wand. “Accio washcloth.”

A small, dark green towel flew from a cupboard across the room and into his waiting hand. He pointed the tip of his wand to the cloth and waved it smoothly. “Auguamenti.”

He used the now dampened cloth to clean himself, and then, with the upmost care, he gently cleaned her, wiping her arousal and his seed from her tender flesh.

If someone had told even two months ago, let alone two years ago that Draco Malfoy would be wiping her Muggleborn blood—Muggleborn blood from her maidenhead—from his cock, she’d have hexed them into the next century and then probably fainted.

Draco tossed the used cloth atop his nightstand. Then he rearranged them, shifting her slightly so that he could lay with his back against the bed and her head tucked against his chest, their legs tangled. She curled up against him readily. It was a touch strange, having him inside her, and now not. Odd, but she felt…bereft. Empty.

But it didn’t seem like she was the only one feeling clingy, at least. His hand kept stroking her back from her neck to the top of her bum in a steady, hypnotizing sweep that was making it rather difficult to keep her eyes open.

“You’re not in any pain, are you?” he murmured.

She shook her head, fingers curling around his waist. “None. I feel…” Boneless? Wrecked? Perfect? “Really wonderful. And a little sleepy.”

Draco chuckled. She couldn’t see him, but there was pressure at the top of her head she’d wager was him kissing her. “Go to sleep then. I’m not going anywhere.”

Eyes shut and blissfully warm in Draco’s arms, just as she was drifting, she could’ve sworn she heard Draco mutter something she couldn’t quite catch.
She woke up some indeterminate time later with an impossible need to use the loo.

The room was dark, save for the glow of the moon illuminating Draco’s face in sleep. He looked a bit younger in this state of absolute relaxation, and terribly handsome.

A grin tugged at her lips, the afterglow of their lovemaking not having worn off, not yet. But she really did need to use the restroom, so staring at Draco and playing back through the pleasure he’d given her would have to wait.

Careful not to trip over anything, Hermione made her way over to the pile of strewn clothes at the foot of the bed. It was an indistinguishable mess of dark fabric, and while she could’ve cast a quick lumos, she didn’t want to risk waking Draco with the light.

Slipping on her skirt and—there was her shirt, perfect—she forwent shoes, instead hastily buttoning her top. The chances of her running into anyone were slim, the restroom directly across the hall from the bedroom and at the very end of the hall furthest from the common room. She slipped from the bedroom, closing the door as softly as she could, and—

Her hand flew to her throat as she swallowed down her gasp at nearly running smack dab into—Theo.

“Merlin.” She took a deep breath. “You gave me such a fright.”

Theo chuckled quietly. The hall was illuminated with dim, golden hewed light on either side, just enough brightness to see him survey her from top to bottom. He smirked broadly. “Your buttons don’t match.”

She glanced down and pinched her lips together. They were all askew, even revealing a strange swath of skin above her naval. She flushed. “Whoops.”

“I take it you had a…nice night?” He wagged his brows.

She snorted. “I did. And I’d love to chat, but I really need to pee.”

Theo stepped aside and swept his hand out. “All yours.”

Shutting the door, she quickly took care of business. She was a touch sore between her legs and rather…achy in places she’d never ached, but nothing major. She flushed, washed her hands and dried them, and left the room.

Theo was standing in the hall where she’d left him, only now he was propped against the wall, hands in his pockets.

“What time is it?” she asked.

He shrugged. “A little after two, I believe.”

Her eyes widened. She’d been out of it for hours. “Two? Where have you been?”
“Detention, remember?” he said.

“Not until two in the morning.”

Theo wiggled his head. “No. I finished up around ten and came back here.”

Here…where she and Draco had been…her face heated. “Oh.”

“You were sleeping.” He grinned devilishly. “Though I did get a bit of an eyeful while I slipped into the room to change.”

Not like it wasn’t anything he either hadn’t seen or wouldn’t see soon.

“Why didn’t you wake us?” she asked.

“You looked comfortable and I didn’t want to intrude,” he said. “I figured it was a bit of a… special occasion.”

She bit her lip, smiling. Draco had certainly seen to it that it was. “You could say that.”

His brows lifted. “So, Hermione Granger’s no longer a virgin?”

She shook her head. “Definitely not.”

“Definitely not?” Theo grinned. “So I take it your introduction to the pleasures of lovemaking was an enjoyable experience?”

A touch bashfully, she nodded. “Very.”

Theo’s smile softened and he reached out extending a hand to her. Once she took it, he pulled her in, wrapping his arms around her waist. “I’m really glad to hear that.”

“It was…perfect.” She sighed.

“Careful,” he warned, voice light. “You’re starting to sound like Draco. All romance and eyes full of hearts.”

Laughing quietly, she smacked his arm gently. “Don’t make fun.”

His face sobered almost instantly. “I’m not. I really am glad it was perfect. You deserved that.”

“Thanks.” Hermione let her forehead rest against his chest. Theo was being so good about this, not that she’d expected otherwise, but… “This doesn’t make you uncomfortable, does it?”

Theo ran his fingers through her curls. “What make me uncomfortable?”

“Discussing this. Draco and I and—”

“Sweet Salazar, no.” Theo chuckled and tugged lightly on her hair until she tilted her head to look at him. “Nothing about you and Draco being together makes me uncomfortable. Quite the opposite. It makes me happy to see you two together. And in regard to this specifically? You have so much history with Draco that it shouldn’t have been any other way. Plus, we both know Draco has a romantic streak a kilometer wide. That’s how your first time should be.”

“Are you saying you aren’t? Romantic, I mean.”
“Depends on your definition of the word, I suppose.” He shrugged. “I like to think that I am, though my particular brand of romance isn’t best suited for deflowering.”

Her face heated, but she maintained eye contact. “Rough shags on carpets and bent over desks?”

Theo cocked his head to the side. His smile was small, secret. “Among other things. But rough shags don’t have to be bereft of romance, you know. You can show someone you care, that you love them, just as much when you’re fucking them hard and fast as you can when you’re making love sweet and slow.”

That made sense. It didn’t feel like Theo cared about her any less when he was whispering filthy things in her ear than Draco did when he was touching her reverently. She wanted both. And she also wanted to know what Theo meant by among other things but she’d chock that away for another time.

“But lest you worry, I enjoy a lazy roll in the sheets as much as the next bloke,” he added.

She dropped her forehead back to his chest with a sigh that morphed into a yawn. “I’m not worried.”

“Tired?” he asked.

She nodded. “It is after two. Where have you been since ten?”

“Common room. Couch is rather comfy and the fire’s warm.”

She reared back. “You’ve been sleeping in the common room?”

He shrugged.

“No.” She shook her head. “You should’ve come in here.”

“Like I said, you looked cozy and it was special and I didn’t want to intrude,” he said.

“There’s a totally untouched bed in there for starters,” she reminded him. “Not that you couldn’t have just crawled in with us. We wouldn’t have minded. I certainly wouldn’t have and I know Draco wouldn’t have either.”

“I’m fine, Hermione.” He smiled, his left hand rubbing circles against the small of her back. “Is Draco awake?”

He was trying to change the topic. Merlin. “No, he was sleeping when I left.”

Theo nodded. “You should probably get back to bed before he wakes and discovers you missing. He’ll panic if he sees you gone and doesn’t know why.”

She reached up, grabbing the hand that was stroking her hair and pressed it into her cheek. “Come to bed with me.”

His eyes widened slightly and she quickly shook her head. “To sleep. Not that I wouldn’t want to, but I’m a touch sore.”

Brow puckered in sympathy, Theo stroked the back of her hand with his thumb. “Just a touch?”

“Only.” She nodded. “You’re coming to bed. You know there’s room.”
Theo sighed as if deeply aggrieved, but his lips twitched. “If you insist.”

They slipped inside the room and Theo shut the door. She made her way over to the bed, pausing at the slight hiccup in her plan. Did she really want to sleep in her misbuttoned shirt and skirt? Decidedly not. Well, then…

Swiftly undoing the buttons before her nerve vanished, she slipped the shirt from her shoulders and wiggled out of her skirt, quickly sliding beneath the covers. When she looked over, Theo was watching her, smiling. He mimed a whistle, pursing his lips theatrically. She bit back a giggle.

Crossing over to the bed, Theo reached behind his head and tugged off his short-sleeve shirt. He then stepped out of his trousers, leaving him in only boxer briefs that like Draco’s left very little to the imagination.

Quietly, Theo crawled under the covers, joining her. She shifted, snuggling her head into Draco’s chest and pressing the soles of her feet against Theo’s calves. After a long minute, Theo wrapped his arm around her waist and pressed a kiss to the back of her neck. “Sweet dreams, Hermione.”

***

Whispers were what woke her.

It was still early, the room dim with hazy early morning light as she cracked open an eye briefly. Too early. She burrowed back into her pillow.

Only her pillow shook slightly, rumbling with quiet laughter.

“Morning, Granger.”

Not a pillow—Draco. His chest was warm and solid and it didn’t matter that he wasn’t a pillow, she was going to continue using him as one.

She rubbed her nose against chest and shut her eyes.

An arm banded around her waist, pleasantly heavy. “Rise and shine, love.”

Not just an arm, Theo’s arm. Wedged between the two of them, she was quite warm, especially considering she was still—

Naked. She was still naked. Right.

This time when she opened her eyes, she kept them open. She was snug beneath the covers, the sheets tucked up to her shoulders. Draco was equally as covered, and likely Theo was, too. Not that she was particularly self-conscious, only the thought of Theo and Draco carrying on a conversation while her breasts hung out in sleep was a little…disconcerting.

She glanced up at Draco. He had one arm tucked behind his head under his pillow and the move did really lovely things to his muscles, lovely things that made her warm inside. He couldn’t have been awake too long, for he still had pillow creases on his cheek and his hair was mussed. His eyes, however, were bright and happy as he smiled softly down at her.

Speaking of hair, Hermione brought a hand up to hers and—ugh. She winced, of course making Draco’s smile widen.

“Your hair tried to smother me in my sleep, by the way. I woke up with it in my mouth.”
Of course he did. Half the time she woke up with her hair in her mouth unless she drew it back in a ponytail or a braid to keep it manageable while she slept. She groaned.

Draco chuckled. “I’m not complaining. Of all the ways to go, death by your hair wouldn’t be that awful. I think we’ve talked about it before, haven’t we, Theo?”

Theo snorted, prompting her to peek over her shoulder. He was equally as rumpled, his eyes heavy lidded and his jaw dark with morning scruff. “We have.”

“You discussed possible asphyxiation by my hair?” Oh, it was too early for this. Much too early for anything but tea.

“Did we ever settle on whether it would be asphyxiation or strangulation?” Theo asked. “Because it could go either way.”

“I don’t think we did, no.”

She groaned. “When was this?”

Draco shrugged and scratched his jaw where his own pale, morning scruff was shadowing his jaw. “Years ago.”

“Back when you thought my hair resembled a nest?” she asked, daring him with her eyes.

His lips twitched. “Resembled? Past tense?”

She shoved him lightly and rolled over on to her back. “You’re insufferable, the both of you.”

Theo’s arm was still draped across her middle beneath the sheet. He wiggled his fingers, tickling her ribs. “It’s a compliment, though”—his smile went wolfish—“if I had to asphyxiate by the machinations of your body, I’d rather it be between your thighs, but perishing by the curls on your head wouldn’t be bad, either.”

Draco laughed. “A good death, indeed.”

“Oh, that’s right.” Theo’s fingers were tracing shapes against her stomach, dipping into her belly button and just beneath, but no lower. “Not a hypothetical anymore, is it? Draco’s been between your thighs.”

Her face heated. “I didn’t asphyxiate him. There was no dying between my thighs.”

“Says who?” Draco rolled to his side and kissed her jaw. “Maybe I died and went to heaven.”

_Merlin_. She snorted. “Twenty points from Slytherin for making such a horrendous joke.”

Draco hummed and continued to trail kisses from her jaw to her neck. “And what could I do to earn those points back?”

Theo’s fingers shifted a hair lower, brushing the top of the neatly trimmed thatch of hair between her thighs. Her breath caught in her throat.

This was…a lot. Not bad, not at all, but she wasn’t quite certain she wasn’t dreaming. And if she was really awake?

“I need to brush my teeth,” she muttered. And then, because that excuse sounded lame, even to her own ears, added of a hushed voice, “And I’m still a bit sore.”
Draco made a soft, distressed noise and leaned back, his expression tender. “Do you need a pain potion?”

“Draco makes the best pain potions.” Theo let his hand rest low on her stomach, no longer suggestive, but still quite intimate.

Did she really need one? She wasn’t in pain, more like discomfort, really, and subtle discomfort at that. But they were both looking at her so earnestly, Draco a little hopeful, that she nodded. “Sure.”

Looking pleased, Draco threw back the covers and climbed out of bed. He crossed the room to a large dresser in a darker shade of wood than the furniture in the Gryffindor dorms, and he did it completely naked, his well-muscled bum completely on display.

Her eyes must’ve rounded because Theo laughed beneath his breath, and when she turned to shoot him a look, wagged his brows theatrically. “Nice, isn’t it? Bet you have a new appreciation for Quidditch, don’t you?”

She bit the inside of her cheek, but a small laugh slipped out.

Draco, who’d been rummaging through a drawer, turned with a vial in one hand and shot them a curious look, one brow arched in question. “What?”

Theo cleared his throat and pasted on a serious expression. “Hermione was checking out your arse.”

“You!” She smacked him lightly on the arm and turned to Draco, who was smirking broadly. “So was he.”

“Oh, I was.” Theo nodded. “I was definitely checking out your arse.”

Draco shut the dresser drawer with his elbow and sauntered back over to the bed, giving them another eyeful, this time of his front. He was a sight to behold, all broad shoulders that led down into a well-defined chest that tapered into a trim waist and slim hips which gave way to muscled thighs and calves. Even his feet were elegant, but that didn’t really hold her eye. No, it was hard to pay attention to much of anything when her gaze kept darting back to where he was hard between his thighs, his cock protruding proudly from his body.

Her face was warm—as was the rest of her, honestly—by the time Draco reached the bed. He stopped beside Theo and extended the vial of pain potion for her to take, which she did. Uncorking the tube, she drained the herbal tasting liquid before handing the empty casing back to Draco. He took it, set beside the bed, and smiled. “So, my arse, Granger?”

She rolled her eyes. Already the potion was kicking in, the ache between her thighs dulling. Draco really did brew a brilliant pain draught. “Don’t let it go to your head.”

“Yeah, Draco.” Theo reached a hand out from under the covers and pinched the back of Draco’s thigh, making him jump. “Your ego doesn’t need inflating.”

Draco grabbed Theo’s hand, but in a quick move, Theo used the new position for leverage, yanking Draco down to the bed on top of him. With a quiet huff of surprise, Draco was barely able to get his bearings before Theo tugged him closer for a kiss that in no time at all became heated.

Drawing back until their noses touched, Draco chuckled darkly. “Apparently I’m not the only one whose ego doesn’t need inflating.”
In case the innuendo was unclear, Draco rolled his hips into Theo’s, drawing a gasp from his mouth as his hands scrambled, gripping the tops of Draco’s thighs.

The sight of Draco naked and pressed against a nearly equally naked Theo with only a sheet between their bodies was more arousing than it had any right to be. An affected little gasp slipped from her own lips as the twinge between her thighs was replaced with a different kind of ache.

Not as little a gasp she’d have hoped because the sound drew both Draco and Theo’s attention. They both cut their eyes in her direction, but whereas Draco’s cheeks turned a vibrant shade of red, Theo grinned. Eyes still watching her, he said, “Maybe if Hermione’s still sore, she wants to watch instead?”

Watch them…sweet Salazar. She clenched her thighs together and nodded.

Draco’s eyes widened a smidge. “Yes?”

Was that really so shocking? Theo saved her need for explanation, “Think about it. What does the thought of watching me take Hermione do to you?” Draco’s eyes darkened, but whether it was because of Theo’s words or how he’d reached between their bodies and wrapped his hand around Draco’s cock, she couldn’t be sure. “Makes you hot, the thought of me fucking her in front of you, yeah? Just like the two of us gets her wet, doesn’t it?”

Theo glanced back at her, brow raised, waiting for her to answer.

“It does,” she whispered. Any louder and the confession might’ve broken her voice.

Her heart was racing, blood pumping rapidly inside her veins as the very arousal Theo had described intensified. Her breasts were heavy, nipples hard, and her pulse was pounding between her legs. She shifted against the pillows, a soft groan falling off her tongue as the sheet brushed against her nipples.

A slow smile spread across Draco’s face as he lifted a brow. “Something else you think about?”

Something else she—oh. Her face heated. “Sometimes.”

Theo hummed in question.

“Last night,” Draco said. “I asked Hermione what she thinks about when she touches herself.”

“And you get yourself off thinking about this?” Theo asked. “Draco and me? Pray tell, what do you think about us doing?”

She bit her lip and shook her head. There was no way she was answering that.

Draco chuckled. “Shy?”

Theo tutted. “That won’t do. Come on, Hermione, share with the class.”

Really? They were going to make her say it? “Kissing, I think about you kissing.”

Theo hummed. “We do that. What else?”

“Erm.” Her eyes flitted to where Theo was gripping Draco’s cock, not stroking, merely holding. “I think about you touching each other.”

“She likes to be vague,” Draco mock-whispered.
“Specifics, Hermione,” Theo said. “Touching each other where?”

Merlin, couldn’t they just get on with it instead of keeping her on the spot? “You know where.”

“Do we?” Theo shook his head. “I don’t think I know. Do you, Draco?”

He shook his head and drawled, “You’ll need to clarify, Granger.”

She bit back a groan. They weren’t going to let her get away with saying something as clinical as penis, were they? She dropped her voice, “Your…cocks. I think about you touching each other’s cocks.”

Theo stroked his hand up Draco’s shaft. When he reached the head of his prick, he ran his thumb against the slit where Draco was leaking slightly. Draco moaned softly, making Theo smile. “That wasn’t so difficult, was it, Hermione?”

Her eyes were locked on where Theo was stroking Draco. She shook her head. “No. I mean, yes. Wait, what was the question?”

“Doesn’t matter.” Theo released Draco’s cock and patted his hip. Draco drew back, putting enough room between their bodies for Theo slide the sheet down. Draco kicked the covers back and reached for the waist of Theo’s tented shorts, tugging them down once Theo lifted his bum.

Her mouth went dry. They were both totally exposed, Theo’s cock lying heavy against his stomach, the head an angry shade of red. Draco’s was a bit longer and Theo’s slightly thicker, but both were rather above-average…as least based on what she’d gleaned from that summer at home when she’d sated her curiosity on the internet.

Now, she understood the mechanics of sex—manual and oral and otherwise—but she really wasn’t expecting Draco to reach inside his nightstand drawer and withdraw of tube of lubricant, not much different looking than the sort sold by Muggle chemists and groceries. Curious, she rolled on to her side, propped on an elbow as Draco squirted a blob of liquid into the palm of his left hand and tossed the tube on the table. Then, kneeling with his legs bracketing Theo’s thighs, he reached down and in his large hand he grabbed both their cocks. Draco began to jerk them both off, their shafts pressed snug together.

“Fuck.” Theo dropped his head back against the pillow and shifted his hips, thrusting into Draco’s fist. He rolled his head to the side, and upon catching her eye, bit his lip briefly and flicked his gaze down to the sheet still tucked around her body. “Show me your tits? Please?”

Draco groaned softly, jaw clenching briefly. “If you want to, he means.”

Theo jerked his head in a nod. “Right.”

It wasn’t as if they hadn’t seen them. Well, Theo had caught a glimpse only, but why not? She slid the fabric down until it draped across her hips, her chest fully exposed. The cool air caused her nipples to pebble further, hardened fully into points that jutted from her breasts which felt heavy. Staring at her chest, Theo groaned, the expression on his face pained. “Fuck me, your tits are perfect, Hermione. Gods, pinch your nipples, will you?”

She swallowed and brought her left hand to her chest. Before she could talk herself out of it, she pinched her nipple between the pads of her thumb and forefinger, sucking in a sharp breath at the pleasant sting.

Squeezing, Hermione pinched until it hurt and then a little more until a bolt of pleasure shot from her chest to her core, her cunt clenching. A little cry fell off her tongue, making Theo groan and Draco clench his jaw.

“You make the prettiest noises. Oh, fuck, do that again,” Theo said, meaning the last bit for Draco who had just slicked his thumb across the head of Theo’s cock, catching a large bead of fluid. With the way they were both steadily leaking, Draco’s fist making a slick sound as he stroked them, it wouldn’t be long before they were both coming.

Between her legs, she was positively soaked. She rubbed her thighs together, seeking some modicum of friction, needing something more, but it wasn’t enough. A tiny groan of frustration clawed its way up her throat.

“Is this making you hot?” Theo asked.

Too far gone to care a lick about modesty, she nodded.

“Touch yourself,” Theo said, voice suddenly tight with desperation. “Come on, love, please.”

She wasn’t really sore anymore, not thanks to the pain potion. And even then, if she just touched her clit…

Still propped on her right arm, she dropped her hand from her breast and slid it under the covers, fingers barely grazing her nub. Just that gentle brush had her gasping loudly.

“Let me see,” Theo begged.

Draco slowed his pace to a crawl and brought his gaze from where he’d been stroking to her half-covered form. He licked his bottom lip. “Please, Hermione?”

They were both literally begging to watch her touch herself and she couldn’t say no, not when she was enjoying watching them, not when a thrill shot through her, the thought of them getting off on her getting off on them getting off making her stomach flutter.

Kicking at the sheet, Hermione barred the rest of her body. Before she could reach her hand back between legs, Theo said, “Turn around so I can see your cunt.”

Another thrill shot through her, Theo’s words and the way he bossed her around making her clit throb.

Moving gingerly lest anyone catch a heel, she spun around, leaning her back against the footboard. Draco and Theo both shifted, turning slightly sideways so they could both watch without having to break a neck.

Suddenly faced with the prospect of actually touching herself, Hermione froze with her knees clenched together and her hands set atop her thighs, more than a little self-conscious.

“Go on.” Draco nodded, eyes sharp, but his smile sincere as he encouraged her. “Make yourself feel good.”

Okay, she could do it. Parting her legs, she crooked her left knee slightly and slipped her right hand between her legs, gathering wetness on her fingertips which she brought up to her clit.
“Oh fuck.” Theo groaned loudly. “Shift your leg a little further. If it’s comfortable.”

Flushing, she drew her knees higher until there was no doubt that her cunt was completely on display.

“You’re so bloody gorgeous, Hermione,” he said. “And fucking soaked, aren’t you?”

She bit her lip and nodded. She was soaked, arousal seeping from her and coating her fingers as she circled her clit. It felt so good that her eyes slipped shut.


Right, watching them. That was the whole point, wasn’t it? She forced her eyes open in time for Draco to resume stroking his and Theo’s cocks once more.

Theo’s eyes were locked on her core, his dark blue eyes watching intently as she rubbed herself firmly. It didn’t matter that she hadn’t put a finger inside herself, she was so wet that even circling her clit was making audibly wet noises that made her blush. He sighed deeply, hips snapping forward as he thrust in Draco’s hand. “Shit, Draco, I’m really fucking close.”

Draco hummed. The tendons of his forearm were standing out, corded muscle on display as he moved his hand even faster. He was panting slightly, his eyes a little dazed as he glanced between their cocks, Theo’s face, and where she was touching herself. “Are you close, Hermione?”

She was. Bringing her left hand to her chest, she plucked her nipple firmly, rolling it between her fingertips. “Very.”

Each circling of her clit brought her a little closer until she was dangling right at the edge, almost there.

“Sweet fuck,” Theo groaned and grabbed the back of Draco’s neck, yanking him down for a kiss as his hips jerked erratically. The move partially obscured her view, but Draco shifted just a hair and it was—Theo was coming, a splatter of come landing against his chest, his face pinched in pleasure, his mouth pressed tight to Draco as little mewls reverberated from his throat.

One more rub of her clit did it. Biting her lip, she tossed her head back as the pleasure peaked, washing over in her waves that stole her breath, her lungs burning and toes curling.

The slick sound of Draco’s fist sliding against their flesh filled the room, joined by his own broken groan. And then, there was the sound of the three of them catching their breath, their pants filling the stone-walled room.

“Fuck me,” Theo said after a moment. “I can’t remember the last time I came that hard.”

Draco chuckled. “Not unbelievable, seeing as you have come on your chin.”

“Could be yours,” Theo reminded.

She opened her eyes just in time to watch as Theo ran his fingers under his jaw and then popped them in his mouth. She sighed softly. “Oh my God.”

Theo hummed, lashes fluttering. He pulled his fingers out of his mouth. “Muggle blasphemy? Means it was good, right?”

She laughed. “Quite.”
Draco leaned back from where he was collapsed against Theo’s chest and beckoned to her with a wave of his hand. “Come here. You’re so far away down there.”

She wiggled her toes. “I don’t think I can move yet. My legs are a bit like jelly.”

Theo reached out, his hand closing around her ankle. Before she could so much as gasp, he tugged, yanking her halfway up the bed.

“Theo!” She shrieked, laughing. “You arse!”

He held his hands up, his face the perfect picture of innocence. “I was merely giving you a helping hand.” A dirty, dangerous smirk curled his lips. “Speaking of which, I’d be happy to give you a different sort of helping hand if you give me a few minutes. Maybe a helping tongue?”

By the time they finally left the bed, she couldn’t remember ever being sore in the first place.

Chapter End Notes

So much smut and more to come *cough*. Btw, the smut um, intensifies and Theo's more dominant personality definitely makes itself known. As a heads up, I might edit the tags but I don't think I need to add any warnings. There won't be any dubious consent or anything of that nature, just you know, plenty of shagging on desks and possible rugs burns.

Thanks for reading!!!
Hey everyone! So, this chapter is a bit angsty and contains a smidge of plot (ish?) before the smut fest resumes. Don't hate me?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“ Theo,” she hissed. “We’re supposed to be working.”

His hand was inching its way up her skirt and along the inside of her knee, distracting her from their translation.

Draco chuckled under his breath. “Feeling handsy today?”

Theo waggled his brows. “You know I am.”

Draco turned pink and shook his head.

“Well, you can be handsy with me once we finish this,” she said.

“It’s been days, Hermione.” He pouted. “Denying me the privilege of watching you come is cruel and unusual punishment, I hope you know.”

“Three days.” She laughed. “Not even. It’s Tuesday.”

Draco slid his parchment across the library table toward her. “Theo does have a bit of a point. You’ve spoilt us.”

Theo hummed. “Our bed is rather large without you in it.”

“Good Godric, you’re the ones who transfigured it to be that size. Shrink it back,” she said.

“When it would be so much easier if you joined us instead?” Theo shook his head.

She grabbed Draco’s parchment and passed him hers, swapping to double check for inconsistencies. “I’m not moving into your room. One, it’s against the rules and two, you live in the dungeons.”

“Rules were meant to be broken, Hermione,” Theo said. “And don’t pretend you’re some prissy, goody-two shoes. Sneaking into the restricted section, brewing Polyjuice potion in your second year, breaking into bloody Gringotts…should I go on?”

“Merlin. I never would’ve told you those stories had I known you’d toss them back in my face.” She laughed. “And yes, I’ve broken rules but usually for a good reason, one that serves a purpose a tad more respectable and altruistic than I’d like to—“

She bit her lip.

Draco grinned and gestured for her to finish. “Do go on. I’d like to hear you finish that.”
“You’d like to…” Theo prompted.

She rolled her eyes. “Do more of what we did this weekend.”

Draco narrowed his eyes. “Refresh my memory, Granger. What did we do this weekend?”

“The both of you are insufferable.”

“I think you mean insatiable,” Draco said.

Theo shot Draco a grin. “Good one.”

Draco’s translation matched hers, so she passed him back his parchment and shut her book with a sigh.

“Are we done?” Theo asked.

“I’m not spending the night,” she said. “Unlike you, I don’t have an open first block. I’ve got Arithmancy in the morning and I wouldn’t have time to return to my room to change.”

“Run by your room tonight and pick up your things,” Theo suggested.

She worried her lip.

For all she’d hemmed about the rules, they didn’t quite apply to them as they did the younger students. As eighth years that were of age, the rules were a bit more lax, at least in terms of curfews and such. It was rather difficult to enforce rules about sleeping arrangements on legal adults who’d at the very least survived a war, if not fought in one. As long as they didn’t flaunt their rule bending, as it was, most of the professors turned a blind eye.

Would it really be so terrible to spend a school night out of her room? No, especially not when it could be spent curled up with Theo and Draco.

“Fine. I’ll head out and grab my things. Meet you outside your portrait?”

They nodded and began packing up their books. She quickly took her leave, making her way down the corridor and up the Grand Staircase to the seventh floor.

“Fizzing fritters,” she told the Fat Lady, who let her pass.

She entered the common room, striding off with a single-minded purpose because as much as she’d put up a fight, she really was looking forward to another night in the dungeons, which were far less frigid when she had Draco and Theo to warm the bed. Her own personal bookends. If she hurried, maybe she wouldn’t even run into anyone. She could just grab her clothing, her toothbrush undoubtedly and her regular brush so there would be no more possible choking on her hair and then—

“Oi, ’Mione!”

‘Mione. Merlin, only one person called her that.

Turning slowly on her heel in the direction of the fireplace, Hermione held her breath.

Ron and Harry were both slouched on one of the couches, with Ginny pressed to Harry’s side. They both looked a little worse for wear, slight circles beneath their eyes and their clothes rumpled, but they were grinning.
And so was she. “Ron, Harry!”

She hurried across the room, throwing her arms around them both when they stood.

“What are you both doing here?” she asked.

Harry cleared his throat. “Mission finished early. Erm, can’t say much on it, but we—”

“Nabbed the Death Eater scum we were after and had time to try poutine.” Ron wrinkled his nose. “Kind of weird, actually, putting cheese curds on chips.”

They’d been rounding up Death Eaters in Canada? She laughed. “And so you both decided to come visit?”

Harry shrugged. “Why not? We’re off the next two days, so we thought we’d stop by.”

“He was missing my sister.” Ron rolled his eyes, but the smile on his face totally undid whatever air of disapproval he was trying to affect.

Ginny smacked him on the arm. “Good to see you, too, Ronald.”

“Oh.” Ron frowned and rubbed his arm. “Merlin, I definitely didn’t miss that.”

Harry shook his head at their antics. “Come sit. Catch us up on what we’ve missed.”

Ginny shot her a barely disguised, wide-eyed look of fear. Despite all her racket, apparently when it came down to it, she didn’t want to be present for this conversation either.

Hermione took a seat in the arm chair beside the couch because she didn’t really have another choice. No doubt Theo and Draco would be wondering what was taking her so long, but when they found out, they’d understand that this interruption couldn’t be avoided.

Her friends were staring, obviously waiting for her to speak.

“Right, let’s see…Transfiguration has been particularly fascinating this year. We’ve been working on human transfiguration and it’s amazing how—”

“Maybe not the school stuff,” Harry suggested with a wince.

She sniffed. “Well, I have been at school, Harry.”

Unlike some people.

He chuckled. “Fine, skip the part about your lessons.”

She bit back a groan. “Erm, there’s not much to tell, really. It’s mostly just classes and working on our Runes project and—”

“Still spending time with Malfoy and Nott?” Ron asked, lips twisted in a grimace. “Gods, I can’t believe McGonagall even let Malfoy back into the castle considering what he did.”

Oh, that did not bode well. She sighed, disappointed. “I thought we’d been over this, Ronald.”

“Excuse me if I’m having trouble wrapping my head around the fact that you’d willingly associate with Death Eaters.” Ron crossed his arms and stared her down with a look he probably used successfully on suspects he was interrogating. But after knowing him for over seven years and
having him seen at his worst, he just looked mildly constipated.

But his words rankled, made her itch between her shoulder blades. “I’m not having this conversation with you if you continue to throw out baseless accusations.”

“They’re not baseless!” he shouted. “Malfoy’s got a fucking Dark Mark on his arm, ‘Mione.”

“You think I don’t know that?” she hissed. “Of course I know that. Merlin, I’ve seen it.”

Ron jolted, his eyes wide and his jaw hanging open. Even Harry looked rather taken aback by that, even if he hid it better. Beside him, Ginny squirmed, seeing where this was going.


She huffed. His tone was grating. “Quit interrogating me. I’m not a suspect, I’m your friend. And last I checked, you both used to rely on my good sense and judgment.”

Harry and Ron shared a look before looking away, slightly cowed.

If only it could last.

“Which is why I’m asking you both to listen to what I’m about to say and take a moment to process it before you react,” she said.

And they were back to looking suspicious, jaws tight and eyes narrowed.

“Are you in trouble?” Harry asked. “Because if something’s happened and you don’t know—”

She helped up a hand. “Harry, please. Have a little more faith in me, would you?”

A few months spent working as an auror was apparently all it took to forgot that she’d been right there with them in the thick of it all, strategizing and fighting and saving their arses more time than she could count. Not that she begrudged Harry for any of it, nor was she keeping score, but the least he could do was give her credence where credence was due. She knew quite well how to get herself out of sticky situations, or at the very least the proper channels through which to seek help if the need arose.


Go on. Gods, what she wouldn’t give to blink her eyes and be under the covers in Draco and Theo’s bed. But alas, apparition wasn’t possible in the castle and this wasn’t a conversation she could keep avoiding. No, she had to face this head on.

First it might be best to have them swear they’d keep their heads about them. “Promise me you won’t do anything rash. And I mean it, no hexes, definitely no curses, and no fists flying. Swear you’ll be mature about this or I swear I’ll—” What would she do?

“She’ll make my bat-bogey hex look like child’s play,” Ginny said with a small grin.

Her eyes went wide, but she quickly recovered, shooting Ginny a smile in appreciation. Looks like Malfoy had grown on her after all.

“Yes, I will,” she finished. “So, promise?”

Ron and Harry shared a grimace. Ron sighed. “Are you asking us to make an Unbreakable Vow?”
She shook her head. “Just on your honor as my best friends.”

Harry groaned softly. “Hermione, that’s practically worse. You know we can’t break that.”

They couldn’t break an Unbreakable Vow either, but the underlying sentiment was sweet. “Good. So?”

Harry sighed and nodded. With a touch more reluctance, Ron bobbed his head. “Fine. No hexes, no curses.”

“No fists,” she reminded sternly.

He rolled his eyes to the ceiling. “No fists, either.”

She cut her eyes. “And no jinxes.”

“Merlin, ‘Mione.” Ron threw his hands up in the air. “You’re no fun, you know? If we can’t even take the piss out of Malfoy with a harmless jinx, what’s left to life?”

She arched a brow, waiting.

“Fine, no jinxes,” Ron agreed. “But quit with that brow thing. You look kind of like him when you do that and it’s bloody disturbing to think he’s rubbing off on you.”

Ginny snorted and muttered beneath her breath so quiet that Hermione could barely catch it. “If only you knew.”

Hermione flushed. She was not going to lead in with that. If she had her way this entire conversation would remain innocent. Or at the very least there’d be no talk of rubbing. “Okay. Now that you’ve both promised”—they nodded—“I’ll tell you.”

She took a deep breath. “See, Draco, Theo, and I, we’ve gotten rather close.”

Ron and Harry both blinked at her with slight frowns, while Ginny merely look unimpressed at her pussyfooting.

“Okay.” She cleared her throat. “We’re not just friends, the three of us.”

Harry nodded. “You mentioned that whole bit about your Runes project.”

“Right.” She shifted on the cushion. “But I don’t mean that. I mean we’re more than friends.”

Harry and Ron were still looking terribly lost.

“Like…best friends?” Ron asked. “I thought we were your best friends.”

Oh Merlin. It seemed subtlety was eluding. She was going to have to hit them over the head with this apparently. “You are my best friends.”

“I know we’ve been busy at the Ministry, and things are different this year, but we’ll try to owl more,” Harry promised, mouth twisted to the side in contrition. His green eyes were so earnest it made her chest pang.

“It won’t always be like this,” Ron said, smiling crookedly. “You’ll finish here and before you know it, it’ll be the three of us again. You won’t have to take up with snakes to keep from missing us.”
She shook her head. This conversation had firmly gone off the rails. “I certainly won’t complain if you owl more often, but that’s not what I’m saying. I’m not looking to replace either of you. I couldn’t even if I tried.”

Ron reached back, scratching his neck and looking uncomfortable. “Then why Malfoy and Nott?”

“I enjoy spending time with them, okay? I like them,” she confessed.

“Why?” Ron demanded. “How can you like them when—’Mione, we fought against them. They’re bloody criminals. They tortured people and murdered—”

“Stop it, Ronald. You’re accusing them of crimes they didn’t commit and you know it. Theo was only under investigation because of his father. He didn’t do anything and his name was cleared.” She took a deep breath. Her nerves were fraying, her patience dwindling. “And as for Draco, he didn’t torture anybody and he certainly didn’t murder anyone.”

“He let Death Eaters into the castle! He tried to kill Dumbledore! Merlin, he used the Imperius curse on Madame Rosmerta and nearly got Katie Bell killed.” Ron’s fists were clenched atop his thighs as he enumerated Draco’s grievous errors. “He’s not some innocent sod for you to, I don’t know, pity.”

She didn’t pity him, Merlin.

“Look,” she started. “In case you’ve both forgotten, the three of us signed our names to testimony that had it not been for Draco and his mother, our lives could—no, would—be quite different. Remember?”

Grudgingly, Harry nodded. Ron merely looked off to the side, his jaw clenching.

“He’s not who he used to be, he hasn’t been for quite some time, if we ever really knew him to begin with. The things he did, the mistakes he made, he did to survive or to save the people he loved, no different than any of us,” she said. “Especially considering the circumstances he was in, the circumstances he’d been in since birth. Gods, he was a child for most of it, no different than us. If we’re all willing to forgive Snape—an adult—and laud him as a war hero, forgiving Draco should be no different.”

She wasn’t about to get into an argument about the many ways nearly all the adults in their lives had failed them at one point or another. This conversation had taken enough of a detour.

Ron’s whole face puckered. “He still used to be a Death Eater. His father’s in bloody Azkaban, both their fathers are in Azkaban. He called you a mudblood, ‘Mione.”

“Again, you think I don’t know all of that?” Her voice rose. “You haven’t been here, all right? You don’t know how things have changed, how they’ve changed. Draco has apologized and he meant it. I don’t owe either of you an explanation, nor do I need to tell you every last thing that’s been said, but what it comes down to is that I’ve forgiven him. And if I of all people can do that, I’d certainly hope that you’d be able to as well.”

Harry wiped his hands on his trousers and shrugged. “You’re right. Malfoy and his mum did the right thing, granted at the eleventh hour, but I won’t argue that. And you’ve clearly gotten to know him better than either of us. If you forgive him, well, all right.”

“All right?” Ron sneered. “Just like that? Malfoy was a thorn in your side since first year, Harry.”

“So were plenty of people, like Hermione said, Snape included. I guess by now we should all
realize the world isn’t as black and white as we once thought it was. I’m not saying I like Malfoy, but if Hermione’s willing to give him a second chance, we shouldn’t stop her,” Harry said.

“Thank you, Harry,” she whispered.

He shook his head. “Sorry, so…we’ve promised no foul play because you’re friends with them?”

“More than,” Ron muttered. “Whatever the bloody hell that means.”

Didn’t he hear himself? Merlin, it was like fourth year all over again, Ron failing to see what was right in front of his face. “It means I’m romantically involved with them. We’re in a relationship. The three of us.”

Wow, she really hadn’t meant to just say it, but too late to go back now.

The room was silent save for the crackling of the logs in the fireplace.

Suddenly Harry laughed, bending over and chortling so hard his eyes started to water. He pulled his glasses off and wiped under his eyes, shaking his head. Ron looked ill, but was glancing between her face and Harry’s, clearly trying to figure out who had had the proper reaction to her confession.

“Hermione.” Harry was still laughing as he set his glasses back across the bridge of his nose. “If you’re going to tell a joke, try to at least make it a little believable.” When neither she nor Ginny laughed, Harry quickly sobered. “Hermione.”

The fireplace was warm, but it had nothing on the heat emanating from her cheeks. “I’m not joking, Harry.”

His lips parted, a shocked little puff of air slipping out. Ron was staring at her like he didn’t recognize her, a look so unfamiliar that for a minute she could scarcely breathe.

“I’m not joking,” she repeated. “It happened—well, it’s a long story actually—”

“Maybe you ought to start telling it, then,” Harry suggested, voice crisp and cold.

And that stung worse than Ron’s look of shock. They were her friends, so of course she’d explain, but she didn’t owe anyone an explanation.

“I’m not on trial,” she snapped. It was absolutely unfair that her voice had to quiver. “Quit treating me like I’ve done something…something unforgiveable.”

Ron still wouldn’t look at her. Harry, however, looked slightly cowed as he shifted on the couch, frowning. “Of course you’re not. Just, you can get angry with me, but can I ask you something?”

“If I say no, you’ll ask it anyway,” she said. “So go on.”

That didn’t mean she didn’t hold her breath.

“You haven’t had anything unfamiliar to eat or drink lately, have you? Something you might not know where it came from?” he asked.

Why would that—seriously? “Merlin, Harry, I’m not under a love spell.”

“Maybe she’s been Imperio’d,” Ron whispered. “Not like Malfoy’s unfamiliar with that one.”
“Watch it, Ronald. I don’t think I need to remind you that the three of us aren’t exactly unfamiliar with that curse, either, do I?” She shot Harry a look from the corner of her eye. “But no, I’m not under the influence of the Imperius.”

“Isn’t that exactly what someone under the influence would say?” His eyes narrowed as if to say gotcha.

“Short of making me drink veritaserum,” she said. “Which I won’t, you’re going to have to take my word for it that I’m of sound mind and body.”

“Sound mind? I knew you’d gone mental, I just had no idea you’d completely lost it.” Ron scoffed before going very still. He turned, pinning his sister with a glare. “Did you know about this?”

Even Harry glanced curiously at Ginny.

Ginny stood from the couch and crossed her arms. “I did, okay? But it wasn’t my place to say. And while I think Hermione’s taste is horrid”—she screwed up her face and stuck out her tongue—“and I’ve told her as much, I don’t think she’s barmy. Malfoy’s a wanker and Nott’s kind of a git, but… they’ve kept their noses clean so far this year, and she seems happy. Nott even hexed someone who was saying really awful things about her.”

Ron threw his hands up in the air. “Hexing someone? How do you call that keeping their noses clean?”


Hermione rubbed the space between her brows where her head was beginning to ache. “Look, it wasn’t Ginny’s place to say anything to either of you. It was mine, and I wasn’t keeping it from you. I wanted to tell you in person.”

“Okay.” Harry’s face was pale, but he shook his head briefly. “Erm, how long?”

She squirmed. “How long have we…?”

He nodded.

“About a month? Right after the holidays.”

Officially.

Harry winced. “And how did you even…I mean, when did you start feeling…?”

Oh, this was really not something she wanted to confess, not with Ron sitting there staring at her, his eyes guarded and sharp. “A while.”

“How long?” Ron demanded. “Before this year?”

She winced. “Ron.”

He stood from the couch. “Never mind. I don’t really want to hear it. I don’t want to hear any of it. I feel sick as is.”

“Ron, wait,” she cried, jumping from the couch.

But he didn’t listen. He stalked across the room, taking the stairs by twos all the way up to the boys’ dormitory where the sound of a slamming door made them all three wince.
I don't plan on Ron bashing in this fic (I'm personally ambivalent on Ron bashing in fics) so I swear everything will work itself out, just you know, not over the course of this one argument. I know Ron seems like an ass, and he's totally acting like one here, but I figure it might be a smidge painful to think your ex-gf had a total hard-on for your supposed enemy *while* you were dating. Not to condone his behavior by any means, but just to give a little insight into my thoughts on it.

Thanks for reading!!!
She wouldn’t have been surprised if Theo and Draco had left. She wasn’t just late, she was very late. Past curfew late, but as an eighth year and Head Girl she had her run of the corridors. Not that anyone would’ve stopped her, not with—well, she couldn’t see her face, but her expression must’ve been that of a warning and a threat in one seeing as how both Peeves and the Bloody Baron had taken one look at her and backed through the nearest wall without comment.

Seething. That was it. Her blood was boiling and she was nearly certain her hair had crackled with little bursts of barely retrained magic at least once. Steam could’ve been coming from her ears a la a Pepper Up Potion and she wouldn’t have been surprised, she was that. Damn. Angry.

The nerve of them, Harry and Ron but Ron especially, to act like she was out of her mind. Yes, she’d expected some confusion and maybe even some shouting and general frustration, perhaps a few barbed comments and even an insult or two—who the hypothetical insults would’ve been delivered by and received, she wasn’t sure—but not that disaster. Merlin, the way Ron had stormed off in a tizzy and how Harry had actually had the audacity to ask if she had fallen victim to a bloody love potion. She never even said she was in love, and she hadn’t denied that Malfoy had once been a total prat. If she was under a love spell her explanations would’ve been irrational and flighty and not come with caveats and talk of shades of gray.

But they couldn’t see beyond their own shortsightedness, their prejudice.

She wasn’t asking them to like Theo or Draco or even like her choice, but they couldn’t even scrape together the decency to hear her out without hurling unfounded accusations and elementary level taunts? They didn’t need to trust Theo or Draco, but her? They were supposed to be her best friends, they were supposed to trust her, and instead they’d looked at her like…like they didn’t recognize her. Neither had said the words, but the look on Ron’s face had communicated plenty. He and that fifth year who’d called her a Death Eater slag were on the same page.

And Harry, he hadn’t bothered to stick up for her. He’d simply shrugged and suggested they all get some rest, as if a few hours of sleep would somehow fix everything.

Despite the hour, she’d quickly grabbed a change of clothes and hurried off to the dungeons, the desire to be with Theo and Draco something physical, an ache in her chest that nothing else would quell. If she had to knock on the damn portrait until someone answered the door, she’d bloody well do it.

She wouldn’t have to. There, leaned against the stone wall was Theo and in front of him, pacing the corridor with tense, measured steps, was Draco. At the sound of her footfalls against the stone, they both turned.

“You’re late.” Theo pushed off the wall, the smile melting from his face as he looked at her more closely. “What happened?”

She meant to shrug and tell them what happened, but as soon as she opened her mouth a stupid sob slipped out, her shoulders curling as she—no, she was not crying. Not over Ronald Bilius Weasley, again.
“Hey, hey.” Draco ran toward her. He reached out, cupping her face in his hands. His eyes were flitting quickly over her, her face, her body, taking stock of her form and searching for the source of her distress. He could look forever and he wouldn’t find it because there was no physical malady to find. He shook his head. “What happened?”

Theo was there, too, right over Draco’s shoulder. His expression was equally as worried, his brows two dark slashes drawn low over his stormy eyes. “Hermione.”

When she shut her eyes, a tear slipped out that Draco quickly wiped away with his thumb. “Ron and Harry are here. They came to visit. I told them.”

Three sentences that didn’t do that utter *bumblefuck* of a conversation—no, *interrogation*—justice.

And yet Draco swore under his breath, understanding darkening his face, shifting his expression from concerned to bitter. “Let me guess, they don’t approve?”

She shook her head. “They were—awful.”

In a word.

Theo squeezed Draco’s shoulder. “Why don’t we get inside? You can convince us not to hex your arsehole friends once we’re no longer in the corridor.”

She sniffed, but didn’t put up a fight as Draco guided her through the portrait and past the common room. Theo opened the door to their room and swept them both inside.

It was only when she was tucked snugly against the pillows—so many pillows; why did those two need *eight* feather pillows between them?—that Draco, through clenched teeth, said, “Do you want to talk about it?”

That was enough to bring on a fresh wave of tears. Talk about a difference. Ron and Harry had *demanded* answers, whereas Draco and Theo were *asking* if she wanted to talk.

Which she really didn’t. She wanted to go back an hour and make her friends see reason. And if that failed, she’d go back and send a veritable *flock* of enchanted paper birds after them. But since she was no longer in possession of a time turner, not that the Ministry would’ve approved it for that particular purpose, she instead took a deep breath, and launched into the story because there was no way Draco and Theo would let this go. It would eat them up, even if they didn’t press. And for her, well, maybe she needed to get it out so it wouldn’t continue to eat *her* up inside.

“They accused of us *poisoning* you?” Draco cracked his knuckles, the look on his face murderous. “Fucking *Potter.*”

“Does he not understand the mechanics of a love potion?” Theo snorted in disgust. They’re aurors! I mean no offense, I know they’re your friends—”


“—but really, of all the daft accusations, that one really takes the cake.”

She sniffled. “They *are* my friends and that’s what makes this so much worse. They didn’t even *listen.* If they’re unwilling to trust you, at the very least they should trust *me.*”

“You know,” Theo mused after a moment of quiet consideration. “I don’t think I’ve even ever had a real conversation with either of them.”
“I basically told them that.” She huffed. “The war is over. If we’re to move on, we need to act like it and stop basing our beliefs on second-hand information and how things used to be.”

Draco raked his fingers through his hair, tugging slightly on the ends. Where Theo looked coiled, muscles full of tension and repressed anger, Draco’s usually cool temper was boiling over, little signs of tension slipping through the cracks of his collected facade. “The perpetuation of opinions presented as fact without substantiating proof is how this bloody war started in the first place. The first leg of it, I mean.”

“You wind up hating Muggles and Muggleborns because a snake-nosed Half-blood told you to.” Theo rolled his eyes. “Not that this is the same, mind you…”

“But you’re right.” She sighed, shoulders drooping as tension was replaced with a weary sort of sadness. “Harry and Ron are what? Going to have children and raise them to hate you and your children, thus creating what’s bound to be a centuries’ old feud all because of some hurt feelings and petty schoolboy rivalries?”

Draco scowled. “I’m not excusing Potter or Weasley for what they did, but it’s a bit more than hurt feelings, Hermione.”

“Draco—”

He shook his head. “That’s beside the point and I have no true desire to play Devil’s advocate tonight. I don’t care what they think of me, but treating you like that? Inexcusable.”

Theo nodded. “He’s right. Of course, I wish things were easier, that they didn’t hate us because that makes life difficult for you, but I won’t lose sleep over them not wanting be chums. It’s that they’re supposed to be your friends. You fought a bloody war together. To crack at the first sign of you doing something they don’t agree with? I didn’t take them to be the fair-weather sort.”

Neither did she.

***

Arithmancy passed in a blur, her mind elsewhere.

Somewhere on the grounds were Harry and Ron…or had they already left? Would they leave without saying goodbye? Usually she’d have gone with no, but now? Everything was messed up, years of friendship that she’d have sworn could weather any storm, suddenly hanging precariously in the balance.

Her stomach ached, had ever since she’d woken up. Lunch sounded just about as appealing as breakfast had, namely not at all which was why she’d skipped the first meal altogether, heading straight from the dungeons to her first class.

Professor Vector dismissed the class. An hour completely gone and—what had they even discussed? How unlike her to not have even taken notes, but her mind was fuzzy, making it hard to focus on anything and—maybe she should’ve grabbed something to eat after all. She had a half an hour before her next class; that would be enough time to slip down to the kitchens and grab a piece of fruit, at the very least.

“Hermione.”

She bit back a groan and crossed her arms. Best laid plans of mice and men.
Standing across the hall from her classroom were Harry and Ron. Harry was smiling tightly, the look altogether forced, and Ron...Ron was staring at his shoes like the secrets of the universe lied in the fascinating knots of his laces.

“Morning.” With a sharp turn, she strode off down the hall.

Footsteps followed. Of course they did. “Hermione, wait. Can we talk?”

They wanted to do this now? Well, she didn’t. But seeing as how she was mature, she’d suck it up. They’d only hound her otherwise, causing a scene that could be avoided.

With a sigh, she stopped in front of an alcove overlooking her favorite courtyard. The grounds were still covered in snow, everything blanketed in shimmering white. A clean slate. She bit back a snort. It was pretty out, much too pretty for her foul mood. “You want to talk? That’s funny seeing as last night when I wanted to talk, I couldn’t get a word in edgewise without one of you two acting like absolute arses.”

“We’re just trying to understand.” Harry shifted his weight from one foot to the other and scratched his jaw, looking like he’d really rather be elsewhere, but he was too stubborn to give up now that he’d started on this path.

“Are you? Really?”

Ron snorted, still hunched over looking at his feet like a cad. “We haven’t hexed anyone, have we?”

“Oh, yes. Thank Merlin for small favors.”

Harry blinked down at her balefully with his green eyes, still looking awkward and ill at ease, but also like he desperately wanted this conversation to go well. “Hermione, please. Help us understand.”

Wasn’t that what she was always doing? Helping them understand everything?

She shook her head and bit the inside of her cheek to keep from tearing up. “Do you want to know what the worst part is? That you don’t trust me. Months we spent together in a bloody tent relying on each other for everything, trusting each other with our lives implicitly, and now—now you can’t even trust me when I say I know what I’m doing and I’m happy? Is that really too much to expect of the two people who are supposed to be my best friends?”

At that, Ron and Harry both looked vaguely nauseated. Harry shook his head. “Supposed to? We are your best friends.”

“They act like it.” Her voice rose dangerously.

Harry set his jaw. “We didn’t mean it like that, that we don’t trust you, we meant—”

“Well how was I supposed to take it, Harry, when you’re all but interrogating me, asking me if I’ve been drugged or cursed? Heaven forbid I choose to do something you don’t agree with, that I don’t run my decisions by you first.” She balled her hands to fists at her side, nails biting into her palms. “I didn’t realize I had two keepers.”

The hall was mostly empty, save for a group of Ravenclaw third years who were clustered several meters away, staring. Ron cleared his throat and put on his best auror voice. “Move it along, there’s nothing to see here.”
“Hermione.” Harry took a step closer, raising his hands up in supplication. “We’re sorry. We didn’t mean to make you think we don’t trust you, we just don’t trust them.”

She lifted her chin. “And if I do? Trust them? Where does that leave us? Can you set your personal feelings aside and trust me to know what I’m doing?”

Tucking his hands inside his pockets, Ron shrugged. “Maybe, if you can explain it? We’ll let you this time.”

“You’ll deign to let me explain? Thank you, how generous.”

Ron winced. “Sorry. I didn’t mean—I’m acting like an arse, I know. Okay? I’ll listen.”

“Yeah.” Harry nodded quickly. “We just want to understand. It’s all a little…you know. Different?”

She took a deep breath. “I don’t even know where to begin anymore.”

Chronology wasn’t even the issue, it was that there were too many threads—events versus feelings versus what was said and what had gone unsaid versus what didn’t even need words in the first place. Sometimes not even she understood how she’d gotten to where she was, how they had reached this point. She was not one to believe in something as wishy-washy as kismet. That was right up there with the unreliable *art* of divination. But sometimes she wondered if where she was had been in the making for longer than she realized, a series of choices, some hers and others not, aligned just so, having led her to this unbelievable and wonderful point in space and time. How was she supposed to explain it in a way that made sense, let alone helped them understand?

“Right.” Harry cleared his throat. “I guess, start from the beginning. You and Malfoy. And Nott. The three of you…?”

“Yes. The three of us are—we’re in a relationship,” she said, refusing to fluster under Harry’s unflinching stare.

Ron looked up sharply. “You’re not just—”

He wiggled his head, cheeks so red his freckles disappeared.

He was asking…*oh.* “No! Not that that’s any of your business, but it’s not about sex. I mean, it is, but that’s not all there is to it. Not that there would be anything wrong if that’s all it was, it would still very much be my prerogative, but it’s not.”

Apparently that didn’t make him feel better because he turned his head to the side, his face looking a rather putrid shade of green. Pea soup with a freckled finish.

“But the *three* of you?” Harry’s emphasis left his question clear.

It stood to reason he’d be curious about that bit. Having been raised by Muggles, his understanding of most magical customs and practices went about as far as hers. Less, perhaps, because the last time Harry had willingly read a book that wasn’t part of the school curriculum or to help defeat Voldemort had been…*oh,* never.

She took a deep breath and nodded. “Yes, the three of us. I know it’s not what most of us are accustomed to, but apparently polyamory is rather accepted in the magical world.”

Harry turned to Ron who shrugged weakly and muttered, “It’s not common, but it’s not weird.”
“So you and them and they’re both…” Harry trailed off with a lift of his brow.

She nodded. “Maybe it’s not the easiest to understand, but I have a unique relationship with Draco and one with Theo and together with Draco and Theo and them with each other.”

“Oh.” Harry frowned. “Okay, sorry, go on.”

“I’ve gotten to know them and I like them. I really like them. I won’t lie and say I haven’t been attracted to them for a long time, but I don’t think this would’ve happened had the war and the world not shaped us into very specific people whose edges fit. I’m not the same person I was back in sixth year. Are either of you?”

Both Harry and Ron shook their heads, little introspective frowns on their faces.

“It’s wrong to assume either of them are the same people either, if we ever really knew them,” she said. “So yes, I was attracted to them, but this year I’ve gotten to know them and I feel like I can be myself around them without having to be someone people think I am or expect me to be, wish for me to be. I don’t have to be Hermione Granger, war heroine or Hermione Granger, brightest witch of her age. I can be myself because—look, I’m not without faults, you both know that and so do they. And they like me anyway. And for them, I understand that, too. They aren’t perfect, I won’t try to convince you of that because it’s not true. There’s—there’s no pressure for me to uphold some image. I can just be.”

A minute passed where she worried no one was going to say anything and she was going to have to keep going, keep fumbling through an explanation until she’d talked herself hoarse, or they understood, whichever came first. Luckily, Ron smiled wanly and with a grudging shrug conceded, “That’s—that’s good, ‘Mione.”

Harry nodded. “It is. So it just, erm, happened?”

“As much as anything can just happen, I suppose? For so long I thought—well, I was worried it was just me because I mean, they were together, they are together, so I didn’t—” She shook her head. She was rambling. “I kind of panicked, really. But we talked. It’s not just me.”

“And no one gets jealous?” Harry asked. “You don’t get jealous? I mean, I want to ask how it all works but I really don’t mean that the way it sounds.” He grimaced.

Ron dropped his voice. “She probably put together timetables.”

“Hey!” Torn between offense and relief that Ron had made a joke, she scoffed lightly. “I do no such thing. We spend time together, all of us, and we also spend time together but separately. I don’t begrudge them their time together, just as they don’t get upset when I’m with one of them and not the other because no one’s trying to replace anyone or be what the other one is, if that makes sense.”

Harry wrinkled his brow, clearly struggling to wrap his head around it. “Seriously?”

“It’s…” How to explain in a way he’d understand, a way that captured the way they just worked. “Draco and Theo have known each other far longer than I’ve known either of them. They’ve grown up together. There are things they share, history and understanding that I could never replace, nor would I want to. I won’t lie and say I wasn’t worried at first, that it would be a struggle or strange, but I’ve quickly learned that what they have, what they share, it’s different than what I have with either of them, and what I have with Draco is different than the relationship I have with Theo. None of it is lacking, it’s just different. And when you add it all up, what we have separately
“And what we have together, it’s like…” She bit her lip. All of this sounded so much better in her head. “It’s like how a piano is different from a violin from a cello. Separately, they sound wonderful, but when played together they create something magnificent.”

They were all quiet for another long, tense moment. Stilted, like they were all thinking plenty but trying to be judicious with what thoughts they shared. At least she was.

“For what it’s worth”—she picked at the cuticle of her thumb nail—“I care about them. I really care about them. And it might be difficult, if not impossible for you to believe, but they care about me, too. I’m not saying it’s always going to be easy for us, or that there won’t be moments of insecurity or growing pains especially once we’re no longer sequestered away from the outside world in this castle. I believe it would be naïve to think we’ll never have to deal with jealousy in some capacity, but I trust that if there’s an issue, we’ll talk about it and resolve it. I’m truly happy. They make me happy and I like to think I do the same for them.”

When no one said anything, she looked up. They were staring at her, twin looks of shock on their faces.

“Are you saying you’re… in love with them?” Harry asked, voice tentative.

Was she? That was such a…big question, one she hadn’t quite stewed on long enough to answer strictly for herself, let alone for her friends who’d just come around. “I don’t know. But if I’m not there yet, I could be. Soon, even.”

Out of nowhere, Ron groaned and dropped his head into his hands. “Are you telling me I’m going to have to get used to being around the ferret for what—the foreseeable future? Blimey, someone put me out of my misery now.”

Harry started laughing and it built, the two of them laughing as Ron held his stomach and groaned pitifully.

“Are you saying you’re okay with this?” she asked.

Harry and Ron shared another look.

“No,” they answered at the same time.

Her heart sank.

“But,” Harry said. “We could get there. But we’ll need time.”

“Loads of fucking time,” Ron amended with a quick grimace. “And if either of them steps a single stupid toe out of line or hurts you, all bets are off. Malfoy will wish he’s still a furry faced ferret based on what I’ll do to him.”

Harry nodded. “Just, be cautious, Hermione.”

She rolled her eyes. “Constant vigilance? I thought those times were over.”

“No.” He shot her a wry smile. “Kind of a forever deal, I think.”

“Fair enough. And I’m not expecting you to be okay with it or understand, not right away, but you can trust that I know what I’m doing?”

Ron blew out his breath and leaned his shoulder against the wall. “I think you’re mental, but your
decisions have usually been decent even if they sounded batty to begin with.” He shot her a tired smile. “And what was that you said about me? I’ve got the emotional range of a teaspoon? What do I know?”

Her chest ached, but this time it wasn’t bad. “You’re at least up to a tablespoon, Ronald.”

“I’ve measured up, huh?” He grinned.

“As long as you quit jumping to conclusions.” Difficult though it was, she forced herself to hold eye contact as she confessed, “It really hurt, Ron. You assuming the worst of me.”

Ron’s whole face crumpled and Harry stared out at the window as if to grant them some modicum of privacy.

“I’m sorry, ‘Mione.” Ron took a stuttered breath in. “Hurting you was the last thing I wanted to do. I just—I did jump to conclusions, and I lashed out because it kind of stung, yeah?”

She shook her head. “What did?”

Ron dropped his head and reached back, gripping his neck. His face scrunched up as he worked through whatever was going on inside his head. “You know, we didn’t—work. And then all of a sudden you’ve got this thing with Malfoy and Nott and you’ve felt this way for a while?”

Oh. “None of this is why we didn’t work. You know that, right?”

“I do. Kind of chafed, though, yeah? But I shouldn’t have implied what I did. You’re not a…” With a wince, he trailed off.

She nodded. “Thank you. Do know that if you ever imply that again I will hex you, understood?”

He grinned. “Got it.”

As awkward as this was going to be… “I think I might owe you an apology, too?”

Harry tore his eyes away from the window.

“For what?” Ron shuffled his feet.

“Well, with all of this happening, Draco and Theo helped me realize courtships in the magical world are a cultural area where my understanding has been…lacking.” She blew out her breath. “Of course I’m working to rectify that, but you’d be amazed at how few books there are on the topic. It’s like no one wants to teach Muggleborns anything which is beyond unfair and a gross misappropriation of knowledge. I mean gate-keeping—”

Harry cleared his throat.

“Right.” She lifted a shoulder. “I didn’t realize relationships were taken more seriously. Not that I was being flippant, but I didn’t know there was an implication of…”

Apparently it was her turn to trail off awkwardly.

Thankfully Ron nodded. “Yeah. Mum was pretty upset, you know? But it really is for the best, us, I mean.”

Harry shook his head. “An implication of what exactly?”
Ron shot her a commiserating look. “You know, mate, marriage. Or at least the potential for one.”

Behind his glasses, Harry’s eyes went wide. “Oh. Right.”

“So everyone around here knows?” Ron asked. “About you and the sna—Malfoy and Nott?”

She nodded. “It’s not a secret. It’s new, like I said. But—Merlin! I have to tell you about Narcissa.”

Harry balked. “Draco’s mum?”

With a tilt of her head, she motioned for them to begin walking down the corridor and in the direction of the Charms classroom.

By no means were things perfect, but there was a warmth in her chest that felt a lot like hope.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for reading!
Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Notes

Be forewarned, smut heavy chapter. However, as I mentioned, it fits the plot and involves some* character building. Eh, it's relationship building. I hope you enjoy! There will be more plot heavy chapters in the future, I promise.

*I use this term lightly.

“You’re telling me I don’t have to worry about Potter trying to curse me?” Draco asked.

She rolled her lips together to keep her smile at bay. “Trying?”

Draco smirked. “I said what I said.”

After lunch, a quick visit to Hagrid’s, a few more threats that she was meant to pass along to Draco and Theo, and a promise to owl more often, Harry and Ron had left rather unceremoniously, slipping away to McGonagall’s office to floo out the same way they’d come in. Her day had been rather busy and she was just now able to catch Draco and Theo up to speed on the day’s happenings and how her friends had sought her out to make amends. Rather than spend an evening working in the library, they’d convinced her—rather charming, those two—into working in their room and once again bending the rules to spend the night.

“No, neither of you needs to worry.” She finished tying her back and secured it with a quick sticking charm. “They’re not happy, obviously, but—”

“When I have given a lick about Potter and Weasley’s happiness?” Draco patted the covers beside him. “Now your happiness on the other hand…”

“I care about that, as well.” Theo nodded. “Which is Draco’s way of saying we’ll play nice with your friends.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “That’s an interesting interpretation of my words, but I’ll allow it. As long as their apologies to you were…effusive.”

“Effusive? Really?” She bit her lip, fighting a losing battle as the edges of her mouth twitched.

Theo stroked his chin. “Did they grovel?”

“Oh, tell me they got down on their knees and pleaded for your forgiveness.” Draco was far too cheerful at that idea. Suddenly he cocked his head. “Would McGonagall let you borrow her pensieve? You could show us.”

She rolled her eyes. “They apologized in a manner up to my standards. Sincerity was my hope, not some ingratiating display.”

Draco scowled. “So Potter and Weasley didn’t throw themselves at your feet. How unsatisfying.”

“Truly. Not that I’m unable to bury the hatchet, but I’m still rather peeved for you.” Theo sniffed.
“If I’m allowed nothing else, it’s to hold a grudge in your honor.”

She stood at the foot of the bed, hands on her hips. The smile she’d been restraining tugged at the corners of her lips even as her chest panged. “You sound like my mum.”

In a rare display of confusion, Theo blinked at her several times before shaking his head. “I beg your pardon?”

“You know.” She shrugged. “Mums hold grudges worse than anyone when it comes to their children. You get into a row with a friend and you tell your mum who’s absolutely incensed on your behalf. A week goes by and you make up with your friend, but your mum will still glower when you mention them three years later. Mums never forget misdeeds against their children.”

An almost wistful smile crossed Theo’s face. “That sounds…nice.”

Nice…oh. Bugger. “I wasn’t thinking—”

Theo waved away her apology with a flick of his hand and a shake of his head, but she still felt rotten over her absolute foot-in-mouth gaffe. Of course he didn’t know about mothers and their grudge-holding protectiveness, not first hand at least. She might not have been on the best of terms with either of her parents, but they were still alive at least.

“I can imagine,” he said. “Narcissa is certainly…inimitable in her protectiveness when it comes to you, Draco.”

“She is.” Draco nodded solemnly, his gray eyes soft.

Theo hummed and repeated Draco’s earlier gesture, patting the covers between them. “I’m willing to let bygones be bygones, but if they exhibit such brash, juvenile behavior again, I hope you’ll consider hexing them.”

“Just a little,” Draco agreed. “Nothing permanent.”

“Or deforming,” Theo added.


Theo wrinkled his nose. “She has pockmarks.”

“She has bangs,” Draco fired back. “But fine. Hex their voices an octave higher for a month.”

Her lips twitched, her earlier smile growing.

“What’s got you grinning all of a sudden?” Theo asked.

“You wouldn’t believe me.” She huffed. “I scarcely believe it.”

“Try us,” Draco said.

“Well”—knees against the mattress, she crawled her way to the top of the bed—“I’m a little relieved that you’re not trying to be all…friendly with Harry and Ron all of a sudden.”

Draco’s pale brows flew to his equally fair hairline.

“I know.” She laughed. “Trust me, it’s an odd sentiment, but I’m happy you’re not terrified I’m
going to be cross with you for being yourself. And it’s no secret you don’t get along with Harry and Ron for a whole host of reasons—”

“Let me count the ways,” Draco drawled, lips twitching.

“Like I said,” she continued. “One day it might be nice if you could be cordial, but I’m not asking for miracles, certainly not over night. Hearing you be yourself about this makes me happy. Granted, I’m not suggesting extra animosity—”

Theo chuckled.

“—but as long as your rivalry remains harmless.” She let off with a shrug.

“Rivalry implies a sense of competition.” Draco sniffed. “There is no competition.”

She leaned in, aiming to kiss his cheek except at the last moment, he turned, so that her lips pressed against his. The best part? He was smiling against her mouth and continued to grin, even after she pulled away.

***

She drew the line at two weeknights in a row spent out of her own bed. Anymore was asking for a trouble, flaunting her rule-breaking. Not that it seemed anyone cared, or even noticed, but it was the principle of the matter, really.

Needless to say, Theo and Draco had been rather sullen at her putting down her foot, pouting openly. It would’ve been pathetic had it not been so damn endearing, and dare she say…adorable.

That was half the reason why she agreed to spend the night again on Friday. The other half? Because she damn well wanted to.

Draco, unfortunately, had an extended Quidditch practice that ran through dinner, but she and Theo went ahead and retired to their rooms immediately upon leaving the Great Hall. She’d already stashed a change of clothes and a few necessities in an empty drawer so she wouldn’t have to make the trip to the tower before heading down to the dungeons.

A good thing, because Theo’s patience had flown the coop entirely. As soon as the bedroom door was shut, he had her pressed against it, the wood unforgiving against her shoulder blades and Theo equally as relentless at her front as he kissed her breathless.

“Theo,” she panted when her mouth was free. His had descended on her neck where he was sucking a particularly vicious mark—if the pleasurable pinch of pressure and teeth were accurate—into her skin. “Oh. I’m going to bruise.”

He hummed and let go, giving the same patch of skin a gentler kiss that he followed with another and another until his lips were against her ear. “What if I want you to? What if I want to cover you in marks? I’ll know they’re there even if you disillusion them. Our little secret.”

That did horribly unfair things to her own self-control, not that she’d had much to begin with, either. As Theo had playfully whined on Tuesday, it had been days and now it had been even longer since they’d even fooled around. Almost a week since she and Draco had had sex and she wasn’t sore anymore, but she was certainly aching.

She must’ve groaned or made a face, a sound, something, because Theo chuckled and suddenly his leg was between hers, his thigh pressing up snug against her core as he held her pinned against the
“I bet I can get you off like this,” he whispered, his voice teasing with an edge of promise. “Make you come without even putting my hands on you.”

He moved his leg, rocking it upward in a way that pressed perfectly against her clit. She whimpered loudly because, no doubt he could, but she didn’t want that.

“I want your hands on me,” she whispered. “Please, Theo.”

His lips curled at her last two words. “Where do you want them, Hermione?”

Even though this wasn’t brand new, how Theo wanted her to talk, her face still flushed as she gathered the courage to answer. “On me...under my skirt.”

Theo hummed and dropped his right hand from her hip to the hem of her school skirt. He slid it just beneath the fabric, his hand squeezing her thigh above her knee. With an arched brow he asked, “Here?”

She shook her head. “Higher.”

He trialed his fingers up, up, up until they reached her hip. His hand wrapped around her, thumb brushing the ultra sensitive patch of skin where her thigh met her body. He arched a brow.

“Over,” she requested, only to groan when Theo shifted his hand to more fully squeeze her arse. “No.”

Theo was fighting against a grin, the corners of his mouth twitching. Even his eyes were smiling as he stared down at her. “Where, Hermione?”

She swallowed down the embarrassment. “My...” She huffed at the words stuck in her throat. “My cunt.”

Theo let loose his smile, his dimples flashing. “Good girl.”

She had about two seconds to bask in the glow of his praise before his fingers were sliding inside her knickers and—not moving. She all but growled in irritation.

Theo quickly shushed her. “I only meant to ask if you’re still sore.”

Merlin, she hadn’t been sore in days. She shook her head.

“Good.” Theo grinned, and then his fingers were parting her lips and sliding through her wetness and—

Her head fell back against the door with a thud as he pushed two of his fingers inside of her and crooked them forward, his talent for finding that spot unparalleled. “Theo.”

“Gods, you’re perfect,” he muttered, thumb brushing her clit and giving her a full-body jolt. “Tell me how this feels.”

“Perfect,” she echoed, the word trailing off into a drawn-out moan as he rubbed her clit faster. “Feels perfect.”

She was close, her knees starting to tremble a bit. Not that she planned on her knees giving out, but just in case, she grabbed his arm for balance, the one not currently buried inside her knickers and
working to bring her off, his muscles thrumming.

“Theo, I’m so close,” she panted. “Please.”

With a devious grin, he ducked his head and placed his mouth back on her neck, right over the spot he’d bruised. It—*fuck*, it ached and something about that pinch against her where she was tender sent a bolt of pleasure to her core that made her clench around his fingers. Her orgasm was wrenched from her, her mouth opening on a silent gasp as her eyes slammed shut and everything locked tight. The pleasure was so good it almost hurt. *Almost.*

Theo halted the movement of his thumb against her clit, but he kept up the movement of his fingers, gently fingering her through the aftershocks until she let out a stuttered breath and her muscles unclenched. Looking at her adoringly, Theo leaned in, kissing the tip of her nose. “You’re breathtaking when you come, you know that?”

She was pretty sure she looked possessed, eyes rolled back and then screwed shut, her mouth gaping open and gasping, but she’d take his word for it. “Thank you.”

Now he, on the other hand, and Draco, too, were beautiful when they came. All jaws clenched tight, tendons in their necks straining and begging for teeth, their eyes hot and dark and then so full of *awe* as they rode out their pleasure, like they’d never get over the fact that she was there.

It was almost as good as orgasming herself, and as Theo had already seen to that…

With a slight push against his firm chest, she got Theo’s attention. He arched a brow, and when she pushed a little harder against him, he smiled and slid his fingers out of her and underwear. And then he waited.

She wanted…well, quite frankly she hadn’t been able to get the idea of bringing him off with her mouth instead of her hand, out of her head. But that seemed a fair bit more complicated than a handjob. It couldn’t be *that* complicated, but *starting* was an issue. How was she supposed to do that? *Excuse me, Theo, I’d really like to suck you off*…okay, on second thought, he’d probably love it if she said that.

““You’re thinking too hard for having just come,” Theo drawled, pulling her from her thoughts.

She bit her lip.

“Penny for your thoughts?” he asked, brow furrowing lightly as she struggled with herself.

Well…he was going to find out eventually. That was the whole point. Oral sex wasn’t really supposed to elude or else you’d missed your mark entirely.

“I want to use my mouth.” When the furrow between his brows deepened, she flicked her gaze down to where he was visibly hard through his trousers. His eyes were wide and lips slightly parted when she looked at his face. “But I don’t know how.”

Theo shut his eyes and shuddered subtly, his breath whooshing out of him. After swallowing audibly, he opened his eyes. His pupils were blown wide, black eating up most of his iris. Her heart stuttered.

“You don’t have to.” Theo said. At her unamused stare he licked his bottom lip and shrugged. “But I won’t lie and say I don’t want you to. The thought of your mouth…”

He reached out, finger tracing her lips. He brushed his thumb along the swell of her bottom lip and
tugged on it gently before dropping his hand to cradle her jaw. “You really want to?”

She nodded, eyes locked on his as if her stare could communicate the absolute sincerity of her desire. She really wanted to, the idea of it making her clench.

His thumb swept against her cheekbone. “And you want me to…tell you how?”

It might’ve been odd, but that? That part was half of the appeal. Theo’s voice instructing her how to—Merlin, how to suck him off, how to use her mouth to bring him pleasure? She didn’t mean to, but a desperate whine slipped out.

Theo’s gaze went impossibly intense, searing as he stared down at her. And she was unable to look away, not with him holding her face. Not that she wanted to look away, not when his lips tipped up slightly as something passed across his face. Understanding.

He nodded and took a step back, and another, his hand falling. He walked backward until he was near the foot of the bed and stopped. Eyes locked on her, he shrugged out of his robe and loosened his tie, undoing the buttons on his shirt methodically, slowly, shrugging the fabric off his shoulders and sliding it down his arms. His hands dropped to the buttons of his trousers and then lowered the zipper.

“Come here,” he said, voice gruff. It took a moment to make her legs cooperate, but once she did, she came to stand in front of him. He quirked a brow and flicked his gaze down between them. Right. Kind of hard to put her mouth on him if she was standing. With care not to wobble, she settled in front of him on her knees. He bit his lip so hard the flesh turned white around his teeth. “Good, Hermione.”

She squirmed a bit, cheeks heating and everything inside her bloody glowing. Was that normal?

Theo made a soft, curious noise, but didn’t say anything. Instead he slid his trousers and his undershorts down, freeing his cock. He was fully hard and this close, his size was…intimidating. She swallowed and looked back at his face.

He rolled his lips together, nostrils flaring as he took a deep breath. “It’s a pretty straightforward concept. Your mouth is soft and wet and hot so practically anything you do with it will feel nice. Licking is good, sucking, too. Mind your teeth and don’t take more than you can handle.”

That was all very good to know. She nodded and skimmed her hands up the inside of his thighs. At their apex, she reached for him, stroking him firmly with her hand as he’d shown her he preferred. His hips twitched a hair forward.

“You’ll tell me?” she asked, running her thumb against the vein that ran along the underside of his shaft. “What you like?”

He nodded and reached out, brushing her hair out of her face and gently cradling the back of her head. “Of course.”

Leaning forward, she darted her tongue out, sating the curiosity to know what he tasted like. The head of his cock where he was leaking was slightly bitter and salty, but not unpleasant. He smelled like the rest of him here, only stronger, more concentrated, skin and soap and spice.

Emboldened, she closed her lips around his head, enjoying the weight of him against her tongue.

Theo groaned softly. “That’s good.”
She wanted to be *great* and she wanted to hear him say it. A part of her she didn’t know existed ached to hear him say those words.

Careful of her teeth, she slid her mouth lower until her lips, stretched wide, met her hand where she was holding the base of his shaft.

Theo let out a tremulous breath. “Use your tongue. Wiggle it a little—*fuck*, like that.”

It wasn’t *easy* but it wasn’t complicated, either. There was a certain rhythm, a learning curve to making her tongue work in tandem with her lips and her hand, but once she got the hang of it, it wasn’t difficult.


Again, she squirmed lightly under the adulation, praise she wanted more of. Moving with a touch more speed, she bobbed her head, dropping a little lower until the head of Theo’s cock bumped the back of her throat. Instinct told her to gag or pull back but she scrunched her eyes shut and took a breath in through her nose, holding still.

Theo groaned, this time a little broken. “Your mouth. Your *fucking* mouth is going to kill me.”

Doubtful. She almost laughed but thought better of it, instead drawing back and wiggling her tongue like he told her to. He seemed to particularly like it when she did it right below where his shaft met his head, where that thick vein seemed to be most sensitive. After a moment, she dropped her head back down, swallowing as much of his length as she could, pushing just a little lower until —

“*Salazar’s rod.*” Theo’s fingers tangled in her hair, tugging…well, *hard*.

It should’ve hurt, and it kind of did, but something about that sting that ran down her scalp made her thighs clench together as wetness pooled in her knickers. A moan she had no hope of disguising vibrated up her throat, making Theo gasp and his cock twitch on her tongue.

She held still, save the rubbing of her thighs, and gathered her bearings. Theo was staring down at her, eyes wide and pupils totally shot. His lips were parted and his cheeks flushed. He shook his head. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to do that.”

Of course he didn’t. She dropped her eyes to his chest, where he was slightly flushed, too.

“But…did you like that?” he asked, dropping his voice slightly.

Kind of hard to answer with her mouth full, she pulled off his cock for a moment. A string of spit connected her lip to his cock and for some reason that made her flush intensely as she licked it away. “Erm.”

She had, just like she had kind of liked the subtle way his hips had twitched when he was in the back of her throat.

Face flaming, she nodded. “Yes? I mean, I think so.”

Narrowed eyes locked on her face, Theo pulled on her hair, not too hard or too much at once, but slowly, testing her reaction. When her curls were pulled taut against her scalp, he tugged a little harder, drawing a tiny gasp from her lips. Not unlike when her nipples were pinched, this too made a thread run from the point of contact down to her core, only slightly different.
“Is that good?” he asked, voice gruff.

She nodded shakily in his hold. “Uhuh.”

He tugged a little harder and she mewled, her hands scrambling to grab at something, his thighs, needing something to hold on to as her knees weakened against the ground and she came perilously close to wobbling back on her bum.

“You’ll tell me if it’s not, right?”

She squirmed. “Yes. But I—I like this.”

A lot. Maybe she was rather suited to rough shags after all.

A grin spread across Theo’s face slowly. One hand still fisting her hair, Theo took his cock in his other hand and held it out. “Go on, love. You’re doing so well.”

Fuck.

Her lips slid down his length a little easier, her spit making things a little wetter this time around. When she had nearly taken as much of him as she could, Theo tugged on her hair, urging her to go a little lower, to push herself a little further.

“That’s perfect, Hermione.” The hand not holding her hair cupped her face, smoothing his thumb over the crest of her cheek. He was staring down at her, lids heavy and eyes dark. “So fucking amazing, love. You’re going to make me come soon.”

Gods, she wanted that so desperately she could hardly stand it. The thought of it made her unbearably hot, her thighs sticky with arousal that was dripping from her, saturating her knickers. Part of her wanted to reach down and touch herself, but that would be a distraction, so she settled on rubbing her thighs together the best she could.

“Is this making you wet?” he asked.

She hummed in response, causing Theo to swear and grip her hair tightly.

It certainly seemed like he was close. Breathing hard, Theo’s whole frame was tense, his thighs rock hard beneath her palm. Sparing a glance upward, his jaw was clenched, eyes heavy, and nostrils slightly flared. His throat bobbed and he gritted, “You look so gorgeous with my cock in your mouth.”

She didn’t have time to spare a thought to how exactly she looked. Behind her, the door to the room opened, the sound of footsteps faltering and then, the click of the door shutting quickly following. Frozen, she paused with her lips around Theo’s cockhead, her eyes surely the size of dinner plates.

Theo’s grip on her hair tightened, just a smidge, as his eyes flew to the door. A smirk tugged at the corner of his mouth. “Draco.”

Her shoulders sagged. She’d figured it was Draco, otherwise Theo would’ve had his wand drawn and hexed whoever had entered without knocking. But knowing for sure it was him was a relief. She pulled off Theo’s cock and took a breath, licking her lips which were strangely hot against her tongue.

Draco chuckled behind her and once again his feet sounded against the floor. “Well don’t let me
Despite his drawl, he sounded nearly out of breath, his voice ragged.

Apparently appeased, Theo tugged gently against her curls, getting her attention. His brows lifted in question.

She nodded briefly and brought her mouth back to his cock, her pace faltering only slightly when Draco came into view. He took a seat against the foot of the bed, not close enough to touch, but certainly in a spot that gave him an intimate view.

Maybe it should’ve made her uncomfortable, Draco watching, but it did the opposite. She could feel his gaze on her and it made her nipples pebble inside her bra.

“Fuck,” Theo swore quietly. “I’m almost there.”

Lavender and Pavarti had once—loudly—had a conversation about the merits of spitting versus swallowing. Hermione had always thought it silly—where in Merlin’s name was she supposed to spit it? On the floor? And then what? Tergeo it? Vanish it? Swallowing always seemed to make more sense, hypothetically. From what she’d tasted, it wasn’t bad.

Mind set, she kept her lips suctioned around him and flicked her gaze up, trying to communicate that she understood and wasn’t planning on pulling off. And Theo seemed to get it, his eyes flaring slightly before dropping to half-mast, and his jaw hard as granite as he nodded.

A low moan rattled through him as his cock twitched, and then the first spurt of come hit the back of her tongue, so far back she couldn’t even really taste it.

Still gently gliding her mouth along his length, Theo pulled her off with a gentle tug when it became too much. His chest was heaving and his eyes were dark, but he was grinning as he reached down, helping her up. As soon as she was steady on her feet, he drew her closer, clutching her to his chest. He pressed his lips to her forehead. “That was brilliant, Hermione. You did so well.”

Her entire body heated at the praise. She licked her lips, tasting him still. “I’m glad.”

Cool fingers brushed the skin of her knee. Draco was staring at her, his cheeks slightly flushed and his hair a little damp, presumably from showering after Quidditch. He hadn’t bothered with his tie, only his shirt and trousers. He arched a brow and gave her a smirk so promising that the muscles along the insides of her thighs quivered. “Did Theo get you off yet?”

Theo scoffed. His eyes were narrowed but he was smiling. “Did I get her off yet? Honestly, Draco, what do you take me for?”

Draco leaned in and pressed a biting kiss against Theo’s mouth. He drew back, grinning. “I’m assuming that’s a yes?”

She nodded, biting her lip when Theo ducked his head and dropped his mouth to her throat, nibbling against the bruise he’d left. He laughed lightly. “But I bet you can go again, can’t you?”

Her knickers were ruined, pointless, really, as she was soaked to the extent her thighs were wet under her skirt. She gasped when Theo bit her neck. “I could—oh, yes—I could be persuaded.”

“Mmm, I bet you could.” Theo’s tongue swept against the hollow above her collarbone before he bit down gently against the thin skin there. “You’re dripping, aren’t you?”
Draco shifted against the edge of the bed, his legs splayed wide. Trapped inside his trousers, his cock was bulging against his thigh.

Distracted by the feel of Theo’s mouth and the sight of Draco, staring at her, his eyes dark and hungry, she didn’t answer right away. Her failure to respond earned her a sharp tug against her curls that made her whimper. If she wasn’t soaked already, she certainly was now.

“Tell Draco,” Theo commanded. “Tell him how wet you are from sucking my cock.”

She swallowed, throat so thick she could scarcely speak. “I’m dripping.”

Draco groaned, fingers gripping his thighs so tight his knuckles went white. “Fuck.”

Theo chuckled and dropped his hands to the buttons of her blouse, undoing them one by one, slowly revealing her bra and skin. “It’s been a whole week since you shagged; I bet you’re dying to have his cock inside you again, aren’t you?”

_Holy hell_, Theo was going to be the death of her. She nodded.

“Tell him,” Theo urged, sliding her shirt down her arms. He slipped his thumbs inside the waistband of her skirt. “Tell him what you want.”

Draco was all but panting, his chest rising and falling quickly as he watched Theo undress her. “Go on,” he encouraged with a small smirk.

She huffed, flustered under their stares and how they were making her state the obvious. “I want to”—she groaned, torn between embarrassment and desire—“I want to have sex.”

Draco grinned, but apparently Theo wasn’t satisfied because he tsked softly. “Vague. I know you can do better than that. Do you want it sweet and slow? Do you want him to make love to you? Do you want it hard? A furious shag that’ll make you see stars?”

She blushed when Draco chuckled. “What was that you said? You saw constellations?”

“Stop.” She groaned, covering her face with her hands.

Theo laughed and slipped one hand out of the waistband of her skirt to pry her hands away. “That’s poetic, Hermione.”

“Quit,” she repeated. “You’re supposed to be asking me how I want it, not making fun of me for things I say when I—I’m indisposed.”

Theo reached back, popping the clasp on her bra before helping the fabric slide down her arms. Between the slight chill in the room and Draco’s stare, her nipples hardened into taut peaks begging for attention.

“I think I know exactly what you want.” Theo swept her hair aside and kissed her shoulder. “Why don’t you lay back and get comfy, Draco?”

Draco arched a brow. “Am I to assume I’m supposed to undress myself?”

“Unless you plan to fuck through your trousers, obviously,” Theo drawled. “Smart arse.”

“Bossy bastard.” Draco grinned.

Theo dropped his lips to her ear and whispered, “I kind of am, you know? But you like it, don’t
She bit her lip, shivering through her laughter. Between the chill and the anticipation of just what Theo had in store, it was difficult to remain patient.

Draco stripped down quickly, losing his shirt and his trousers beside the bed. He slid his undershorts down his bum and thighs, kicking them off before crawling atop the mattress and settling in, arms casually bent behind his head, totally relaxed in his nudity.

Not that he had any reason not to be confident. Propped against the pillows, Draco was all perfect pale skin and lean muscle, looking like a Roman statue carved from marble. His hair was tousled and sexy, his cock hard against his stomach, and the droop of his lids and the curve of his lips promised pleasure so good she’d likely forget her name.

“Gorgeous, isn’t he?” Theo whispered.

She nodded.

“You’re gorgeous, too.” Theo pressed another kiss to the ball of her shoulder before tugging sharply on her skirt and knickers, quickly divesting her of both as they pooled at her feet. “And you’re going to look even more stunning riding Draco’s cock.”

Merlin. More wetness seeped from her as she stared at Draco who lifted a brow, lips still smirking.

Okay. She could do that. She wanted that, but like most of the new things she’d discovered she wanted—sex things—she didn’t know how. It should be pretty instinctive, but sex was more than mechanics. She turned slightly, looking up at Theo in question.

He patted her on the hip. “Come on. You’ll like this.”

Well, that wasn’t even a question, her liking it. But she did as bade, knees on the edge of the mattress before crawling her way up the bed toward Draco. He grinned as she came to kneel over his thighs, and reached for her, hands squeezing her knees. “Okay?”

She nodded.

Theo had joined them in bed, crouching behind her. He tucked his chin over her shoulder and put his hands on her hips, guiding her slightly forward. “Still wet?”

She scoffed, which apparently wasn’t the right answer because Draco reached between her thighs, checking. His fingers glided through her folds, one sliding inside her with ease.

Draco swore beneath his breath and added another finger, curling them against her front wall and making her gasp. “You’re drenched, Hermione.”

She rocked down against his fingers and Theo’s hands squeezed her hips. “I told you,” she murmured.

One more curl of his fingers and Draco pulled his hand away, making her groan in frustration. He lifted his hand and her face flushed at how his skin was shiny with her arousal all the way down to his palm. With a quick grin he lifted his fingers to his mouth and sucked them clean. “Delicious.”

Another groan of frustration slipped out and Theo shushed her. “Relax. We’re going to take care of you.”
Draco reached for his wand and quickly cast the contraceptive charm before tossing it aside and taking his cock in hand. He held it up, perpendicular to his body. Theo guided her up and forward until she was hovering over Draco length, but he didn’t let her move further. He held her still as Draco ran the head of his cock through her folds, teasing her clit and coating himself in her arousal, making her pant anticipation.

“Do whatever makes you feel good, all right?” Theo said. “Anything you do’s going to feel great to Draco, regardless.”

Draco hummed in agreement and finally stopped teasing. His cock was resting at her entrance, waiting for her move.

Resting her hands on Draco’s chest, she sank down, just a bit, the head of his cock slipping inside her. Despite not feeling sore now, she didn’t want to move too fast, and it seemed Theo didn’t want her to, either. His hands were holding her steady, fingers biting into her hips to keep her from eagerly impaling herself on Draco’s length.

It didn’t sting like the last time, that initial intrusion. Instead, it was all pleasure, the way Draco’s cock filled her up, stretching her, molding her around him. She sank down lower, still slow, pacing herself, but at no point was there any pain, an absolute relief that that aspect was behind her.

All the while, Draco was holding himself still even though it looked like it pained him to do so. His jaw was clenched, his lips nearly white from pressing them together so tightly, and from the way his chest was barely moving it looked as if he was holding his breath.

“That’s it,” Theo murmured softly, encouraging.

She wasn’t flush with Draco’s body and yet he was pressing into her, against her cervix she was pretty sure, the angle making it impossible for her to sink further. She huffed. “I can’t go lower.”

Theo tilted her hips. The position made her arch and made it possible for her to sink the rest of the way down, which she did, gasping quietly when he bottomed out.

“Good girl.” Theo released his hold on her hips and swept his hands up her tummy to her chest, where he tweaked her nipples lightly. She clenched around Draco, making him squeeze his eyes shut on a groan. Theo chuckled and tested the weight of her breasts, massaging them as he dropped kisses against the back of her neck and shoulder. “You did so well, taking his cock.”

She glanced down and—maybe it was silly, but it was strange and wonderful to think that, while she so full of him now, the rest of the time there was this empty space within her that she’d never really thought of as empty until she knew what it meant to truly be full.

Draco’s jaw slid forward, the tendons of his neck straining. He took a stuttered breath in and let it out slowly, sliding his hands up her thighs.

Theo chuckled softly. “And how are you fairing, Draco?”

Draco grumbled something unintelligible.

“Congratulations, Hermione. Your cunt has rendered Draco speechless.”

She laughed, making Draco groan. He shook his head and opened his eyes, looking a touch desperate, frazzled even. “Stop. You squeeze my cock when you laugh and it’s driving me mad.”

She’d been still long enough, her body long acclimated. Theo and Draco had both told her to do...
what felt good and she wouldn’t know until she tried, so she started small, rocking forward. Even that small move did something extremely pleasant, Draco’s cock pressing against that spot inside her.

Theo was quiet, letting her figure out what she liked. Not that he was hands off, no. He pinched her nipples, driving her insane, making her ache. This was good, what she was doing, but it wasn’t going to be enough to come.

Testing the waters once more, Hermione tensed her thighs and rose up until just the head of Draco’s cock was inside her. Then, more quickly than the first time, she sank back down. Draco’s fingers spasmed against her thighs as he moaned quietly.

Apparently he liked that, so she did it again, this time angling her hips and—“Oh my God.”

She’d come down hard and Draco’s cock was pressing against that spot within her with just the right pressure, making her insides quake and her thighs tremble. Swallowing thickly, she did it again and again until little punched out sounds were coming from Draco’s mouth as he stared up at her, gaze molten like liquid mercury. The heat in his eyes matched the fire coursing through her veins and building between her legs.

“Hermione,” Draco groaned her name and dug his head into the pillow. “Fuck, you feel perfect.”

She couldn’t respond, not when it was taking all her energy, her focus, to keep up this perfect pace she’d established. Her muscles were trembling, thighs burning, but she couldn’t stop, not when she was so close.

Theo’s left hand dropped to her hip, helping her rock atop Draco. His other hand slithered between her legs, his fingers circling her clit, making her bite her lip. He kissed the hinge of her jaw, her neck, everywhere his lips could reach.

“You’re so beautiful,” he whispered, rubbing her firmly and making her keen. “You look like a bloody goddess riding his cock.”

She was so fantastically close to coming that she could taste it, the satisfaction sweet on her tongue as she sank down on Draco once more as Theo flicked her clit. It was a small mercy Theo was holding her up because she tossed her head back, neck arching as she clenched her eyes shut, spots of color bursting behind her lids as everything inside her drew up tight and pulsed with pleasure.

Draco’s nails bit into the skin of her thighs as he thrust upward, her rhythm faltering as she fractured atop him. Three quick, hard thrusts and he was groaning, his cock twitching as he came.

“Beautiful,” Theo whispered, fingers abandoning her oversensitive clit when she whimpered. He stroked her sides, her arms, and held her steady as she came down, blinking back to reality.

Draco chuckled, the sound a little breathless. “Thanks. You’re not half bad yourself, dear.”

She snorted, head still rolled back, resting against Theo’s shoulder. She needed to move, Draco was slipping out of her, but her thighs ached and moving sounded too difficult.

“Prat.” Theo laughed. “Fishing for compliments is a sure fire way for me to withhold them.”

Draco’s bottom lip jutted out in an exaggerated pout.

“Fine.” Theo rolled his eyes. “You’re handsome when you aren’t being a prat and stealing her compliments.”
“I’ll take it.” Draco lifted a hand beckoning her closer. “Come down here.”

Theo patted her on the hip. “Go on. Draco wants a cuddle.”

“What I want,” Draco said, “is a kiss. I’ve barely even gotten one of those. From either of you.”

Matter of fact, he hadn’t. A tragedy, working off of his expression.

Summoning the motivation, she rose up, pulling a face as Draco slipped out of her the rest of the way. A rush of fluid came with it, dripping down her thigh and making her flush. “Erm. Can someone hand me my wand?”

Draco wrinkled his nose and blinked up at her, the lids of his eyes heavy. “What for? You’re supposed to be kissing me.”

She pressed her lips together and waited while Theo crawled off the bed and rummaged around on the ground for her wand. He handed it over, watching curiously as she pointed it downward and cast a quick *evanesco*.

Draco and Theo both stifled laughs.

“Stop,” she demanded. “You can laugh when *you’re* the one leaking come.”

Draco and Theo both froze. Theo broke first, sputtering with laughter, and Draco quickly followed suit, snickering with his eyes clenched shut.

Her eyes widened as her mouth popped open. She covered her face with her hands and snorted, realizing that wasn’t unheard of. “Oh.”

Theo sputtered, “I’ll make sure to keep that in mind next time.”

“Same,” Draco said, sniffing through his laughter.

She groaned, but let Draco tug her down on to his chest where she proceeded to bury her face. “You’ve had your fun at my expense, ha ha. Excuse me if I don’t exactly have my…faculties about me after that.”

Of course Draco was smirking down at her when she lifted her head. “First I make you see constellations and now I make you lose your faculties? Merlin, Granger, you do know how to stroke a man’s ego, I’ll grant you that.”

She smacked his chest lightly. “Shut up, Malfoy.”

He arched a brow. “Oh, we’re back to my surname, are we?”

“I’m cross with you.” She sniffed, laying it on thick. “Very cross.”

Draco trailed his fingers up her spine, making her shiver. “Bet I can make it up to you,” he whispered.

No doubt he could.
As a bit of a Christmas present (if you celebrate, if not just consider this a nice late December surprise) I'm posting three chapters tonight. Woohoo. Mostly because the first two are smut heavy, so I figured I'd tack on the third chapter for a bit of balance. I won't be posting again until after the 26th, so I hope this mega-update tides everyone over until then!

I hope you enjoy!

“Are we going to talk about it?”

She tore her eyes away from her potions textbook. Across the table, Theo tapped his quill against his parchment. How he managed to do that without dribbling ink all over the place, she wasn’t sure.

“Talk about what?” she asked when he didn’t go on.

He shrugged, the very picture of nonchalance save for the spark in his eyes. “You know.”

“I really don’t.” She shook her head. “Tell me.”

Theo nodded, dropping his eyes back to his parchment. “Did you finish your transfiguration essay yet?”

What? This conversation wasn’t making a lick of sense. “Yes? I finished last week.”

“So early?” Theo glanced up at her through his lashes, his lips pulling to the side in a smile. “I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised. You are brilliant.”

Okay? She laughed lightly. “Thank you?”

Theo rolled his eyes. “Okay, that missed the mark. Good job, Hermione. You’re such a good girl.”

She froze, knees knocking under the table. Her eyes flew to his, and he was watching her closely, a knowing little smirk on his face. She cleared her throat. “Thanks.”

“Again, I say,”—Theo huffed, amusement and something else she couldn’t put her finger on, making his voice warm—“are we going to talk about it?”

“So we need to?”

He gave another decidedly unaffected shrug and dropped his quill. “Are you opposed?”

They were in the library, but it was during her open period, a time when most students weren’t anywhere near. Usually Theo was in class, but his block of potions had been canceled thanks to a mishap earlier in the day. Apparently a second year had knocked over an entire cauldron of Drowsiness Draught, effectively knocking out half the class based on the wafting fumes alone.
They’d had to close off the entire classroom to let the potion expire because each time someone stepped inside the room for longer than a moment, they conked out.

But no, she wasn’t opposed to talking about it, she just…didn’t know what to say. She shook her head.

As if sensing her discomfort, Theo reached across the table, grabbing her hand. “We don’t have to talk about it if it makes you uncomfortable.”

“Merlin.” She shook her head, a smile tugging at the corners of her lips. “You and Draco seem to think everything makes me uncomfortable. I’m not, for the record. I just don’t what you want me to say.”

Theo studied her for a moment, his gaze soft but intense. “You like it when I tell you what to do?”

She nodded. “In the…proper context, yes.”

He huffed. “Should I be offended? I don’t boss you around outside of bed…much.”

“Much.” She laughed. “I don’t let you get away with it otherwise.”

He seesawed his head. “Debatable. I got you to clear the air with Draco and go to a Quidditch game, and a Quidditch after party, and—”

“Oh. Those are awful examples seeing as one, you didn’t boss me, you begged, and two, I secretly wanted to do those things so getting me to say yes wasn’t really a hard-won victory.”

He cut his eyes. “Minx.”

She grinned.

“Fine,” he amended. “You like when I tell you what to do in the proper context.”

“Yes.”

“And you like when I”—Theo flicked his brows upward—“praise you.”

She bit the inside of her cheek and nodded.

Theo hummed. “All right.”

“All right?” That was it? All he was going to say was all right?

His thumb swept against the back of her hand, dampening her frustration. “Did you think I was going to say oh, that’s weird?”

“Well, no,” she conceded. “But I figured you were going to say something more than all right.”

“I just wanted to be sure. I mean, I was almost certain you had a bit of a praise kink, but I—”

“Whoa, excuse me.” She shook her head. “I don’t have a kink.”

Theo snorted. “You say it like it’s a bad thing, which it’s not. It gets you hot when I praise you, ergo, you have a praise kink. And like I said, I’m not exactly shocked, what with the way you nearly wet yourself each time a professor awards you house points for knowing the correct answer.”
She scoffed. “I do no such thing. *Wet myself, Merlin.*”

“Okay.” Theo leaned forward in his chair, dropping his voice. “Imagine this scenario. I’m a professor—”

She snorted.

“I *am* a professor,” he repeated, rolling his eyes. “And I call you into my office to discuss your last paper.”

“Do you look like yourself? Or are you supposed to be any professor?” she asked.

“Me, I look like me. I’m Professor Theodore, a charming new hire, and I teach…magical kinesiology.” He waggled his brows.

If she rolled her eyes any harder she’d pull something, surely. “Go on.”

“And I call you into my office to discuss your *firm grasp* of the essay’s topic. We go over your paper—”

“What’s the topic?”

He blinked. “Seriously?”

She lifted a brow.

“Ugh.” He blew out a breath. “It’s about…how physical exertion effects magical use. So we go over your paper—”

“That actually sounds quite interesting. I think there was a study done—”

“Hermione.”

She bit her lip. “Go on.”

He shut his eyes and laughed through his nose. “As I was saying, we go over your paper and I tell you *My, you are an exceptionally talented witch, Miss Granger. I’ve never been so proud of a student before.* Are you telling me that doesn’t get your knickers a little wet?”

She continued to worry her lip. “Okay, I see what you’re saying. But it would be remiss to presume *all praise*”—she dropped her voice—“gets me hot. It turns me on when you do it. And Draco, too. The rest of the time, it’s gratifying yes, but not sexually.”

Theo inclined his head. “Fair. As long as you’ll concede that it *is* a kink.”

“Fine.” She nodded. “I can concede that.”

“Good.”

She waited for him to go on and when he didn’t, she asked, “So you wanted to talk about this, because…?”

He smirked. “I mostly just wanted to hear you admit it.”

She crumpled up a piece of parchment and threw it at his head.
The owl arrived on Wednesday, three days before Valentine’s Day.

Not just any owl, but a great grey owl, massive in size and commanding in presence. It landed on top of the dining table and stole the bacon off her plate while balancing on one, sturdy leg. Its other leg stuck out, presenting her with a scroll she carefully untied. Bacon demolished, the owl blinked its yellow eyes at her twice, slowly, and gave a series of rhythmic woos before flying off, its wingspan easily over four feet as it sailed overhead.

That wasn’t Harry’s owl, certainly not Ron’s or any of the Weasley’s. Who else would be writing to her other than—oh no. It wasn’t a Ministry owl, was it?

She frowned down at the exterior of the rather non-descript scroll. That was exactly what she needed, more correspondence from Shacklebolt strong arming her into agreeing to yet another charity event. It was commendable, how the Ministry was tackling the relief effort with diligence in these post-war times, but she’d attended…eight? Ten? Charity galas that summer alone, and another two over the Christmas holiday.

The Ministry needed money to fund their efforts, fine, but using her—and Harry and Ron—to draw donors in with the promise of rubbing elbows and snagging a picture with real war heroes was annoying at best, offensive at worst. Schmoozing up rich folks, many of who had defected to other parts of Europe rather than stay and fight, wasn’t her idea of a good night. She’d rather help with the effort some other way, something tangible rather than aiding the Ministry in capitalizing on her clout. According to Kingsley, money was what they needed first and foremost because those tangible efforts she wanted to help with? They couldn’t even be started without the proper funds, funds the Ministry simply didn’t have, not even after seizing the properties and vaults of incarcerated Death Eaters and taking reparations from those who had avoided prison.

This didn’t quite look like the letters she’d received from Kingsley in the past, but that didn’t mean it wasn’t still from the Ministry. Maybe, after she’d ignored his last two missives, he’d switched it up with a different style of parchment? Or, if it wasn’t from him or his secretary, it was from one of the departments that had offered her a job. She’d gotten a few of those from the Department of Mysteries, offering her practically whatever she wanted if she’d take her N.E.W.Ts early and start work as soon as possible.

She wouldn’t know until she opened the damn thing.

Her eyes flitted over the unraveled scroll.

Dearest Miss Granger,

I hope this letter finds you well. Draco has told me you are all nearly finished with a rather intense Ancient Runes assignment and that you have already begun studying for your N.E.W.Ts. Bright as you are, I’m certain you’ll do outstandingly.

I’d like to extend another apology for my behavior in Madame Puddifoot’s. I am terribly sorry and I certainly hope you’ll forgive me for my misunderstanding and lack of awareness regarding the circumstances under which we met. If I gave you the impression I was displeased with your relationship with my son and Theodore, that was not my intention. Not at all, truly. I’m quite pleased, rather.

As the Easter holiday approaches next month, it was my hope that you might do me the honor of joining me for tea. Please feel free to owl me your availability as I’m happy to accommodate your
schedule. The gardens at the Manor are most enchanting during the spring, though I’d also be willing to meet elsewhere if you’re more comfortable.

I look forward to your correspondence.

Sincerely,

Narcissa Malfoy

That was…wow. She’d thought Narcissa’s invitation to tea had been an empty showing of manners, but apparently she was sincere and actually wanted to sit and drink tea and…talk. Talk about what? Oh, I love what you’ve done with the Manor since the last time I was here being tortured by your sister. You’ll have to share how you got my blood out of your rug. Was it a charm or a potion? By the way, those decorative pillows are lovely.

Did Narcissa really think tea was a good idea? All they had in common was Draco and…Gods, she’d never had to sit across from the mother of someone she’d shagged before. For so many reasons, tea was bound to be awkward.

Quickly rolling the letter back up, she tucked the parchment into her robes for safekeeping and set off in search of Draco. If anyone could give her insight into the inner workings of Narcissa’s mind, it would be him.

***

“The gardens are wonderful this time of year.”

Was he—his lips twitched. Merlin. “Draco, be serious, please.”

He set the letter aside on his bedside table. “Well, they are.” When she shot him a glare, he chuckled and patted the covers beside him. “Quit pacing and come here.”

She wasn’t pacing, she was…walking…a short distance…repeatedly…because it helped her process her thoughts. Ugh. She sighed and dropped down atop the bed, flopping back against the pillows. “Why?”

“Why what?” Draco propped himself up on his elbow and stared down at her. “Why does my mother want to have you over for tea?”

“Obviously.”

He hummed. “Let’s see, it could have something to do with how you’re romantically involved with her only child? Perhaps? Who could say, though, it really is a mystery. You might need to hit the books for this one.”

She huffed. “Cheeky.”

Draco leaned down, brushing his lips against hers in a barely there kiss that made her sigh and melt further into the mattress. He drew back, lips quirked in a smile. “My mother wants to have tea with you. Is that a crime?”

“Of course not.” She wasn’t…offended, merely…taken aback. And confused. “I just didn’t think she was serious about her offer in Madame Puddifoot’s.”

“As capable as my mother is at putting on airs, she wouldn’t have mentioned tea had she not been
interested. She’d have made some vague comment about seeing you around sometime and then said it was nice to see you and the corner of her left eyebrow would’ve twitched. But that didn’t happen. She truly wants to get to know you better. Not as Ministry darling and war heroine, but you, the woman who’s dating her son.”

A fair desire. She couldn’t really fault Narcissa for wanting to better understand her and her intentions as awkward as that sounded. Narcissa had been privy to Draco’s feelings for years; she was probably curious when Hermione’s feelings toward Draco had changed.

She hadn’t intended on saying no to tea, but… “Enchanting gardens aside, I don’t know how I keen I am on visiting your mother at your home,” she confessed.

Draco’s smile flattened out, his eyes flickering with anguish. “Right.”

“I don’t know if I’m ready to go back there yet,” she whispered.

If ever.

Draco nodded tightly. “Of course.”

For a moment, the air went thick with words left unsaid.

“In case it helps, my mother has… redecorated.”

It took four seconds for her to crack, laughter spilling out from between her tightly pressed lips. “Redecorated?”

He looked like he didn’t know whether to join her in laughing at the absurdity or wince at it. He settled on an awkward smile. “More of a remodel, I’d amend. In addition to the confiscation of any and all dark artifacts, Mother knocked down the walls to the drawing room. It’s all rather open concept now. Dare I say, airy, even.”

The idea of Malfoy Manor being airy was so laughable she couldn’t stand it. Her stomach muscles burned by the time she pulled herself together. “I’m sorry. I just—I can’t. Airy?”

Draco cracked a smile, this one authentic. “As airy as the place could ever be. She charmed the wallpaper cream and gold and there’s a wall of windows looking out over the gardens, so….”

Wow.

“I won’t lie and say that I don’t wish you’d at least accept my mother’s invitation, but I do understand if you’d rather avoid the manor altogether and I’m sure she understands, too. Trust me when I say there was a time when I had no desire to return home, but the place not only looks different, but it feels different now. It feels…cleansed.”

She could reply to Narcissa saying she’d rather meet somewhere else, but what then? How long could she avoid setting foot in the manor when it was where Draco lived? In a few short months, the school year would be over and seeing Draco and Theo wouldn’t be a matter of simply walking through the castle from one dorm to the other. Unless Draco planned on moving out, which wasn’t likely, she couldn’t avoid the manor forever.

“I suppose I’ll wind up visiting eventually, right?” she asked, smiling slightly.

Draco chuckled. “I do have a fireplace connected to the Floo network in my bedroom, in case that persuades you to visit at some point.”
It did, actually. The Manor was massive, but she didn’t love the idea of Narcissa catching her Flooing home early in the morning in her clothes from the day prior.

“I’ll keep that in mind.” She smiled. “And I suppose I’ll owl your mother letting her know I’d be happy to join her for tea at your home.”

“Only if you’re sure,” Draco stressed.

She wasn’t. Well, she wasn’t confident or comfortable, but at least if she went through with this, no one could say she hadn’t tried, that she hadn’t faced her fears. Maybe it wouldn’t be pleasant, but perhaps returning to the scene of one of her most painful memories would be cathartic, a blessing in disguise. “You’ll be there, right? Not at tea, I mean, but at home over the holiday?”

At the very least, Draco’s present would serve as a small comfort.

“I will, as will Theo. We can collect you from the Floo, if you’d like. Or you can Floo to my room directly if you’d rather.”

“Theo’s going to be there?”

Currently Theo was tutoring a group of third-year students in Arithmancy, a subject he excelled in, perhaps even more than she did.

Draco nodded. “He’s taken to staying at the manor over breaks when possible. Which now, is practically always. Believe it or not, Malfoy Manor has always been warm and welcoming compared to Nott Manor, even before my mother’s little redecorating stint.”

She shivered at the thought of there being a place colder and more imposing than Malfoy Manor. Then again, Theo’s father had been head of the house until his recent incarceration and from what she’d heard of him, the man was not someone she’d ever want to share a house with. It was no wonder Theo had stayed with Draco whenever possible to escape his father. And now, it was doubtful he’d want to stay alone in a place so large and full of bad memories.

“He’s lucky to have you,” she said.

Draco shook his head. “It’s the other way around. If it hadn’t been for Theo…”

He trailed off, eyes looking grim and distant, haunted.

“You’re lucky to have each other, I mean.” She reached out, brushing back the hair that fallen over his brow and into his eyes.

She was relieved that Draco and Theo had had each other through all their most trying times, that through the inescapable hells they’d suffered, a resilient love had been forged between them. But there was also an underlying sadness that they’d gone through those horrors in the first place, and frustration, no, anger, that life had dealt them such a hand and left them with scars they’d bear forever, scars both seen and unseen. Finally, her stomach churned with a sickly sense of something too close to approaching envy for her taste, of course followed by shame. She didn’t begrudge them their closeness, and she seldom felt like an outsider or intruder, but in this moment? Would she ever know them on the level they knew each other, inside and out?

Draco captured her hand and pressed his lips to her wrist. “And now we’re lucky to have you.”

She’d have never before said she was the type to swoon, but that kiss plus those words? Merlin. Talk about silly insecurity. It was ridiculous to compare what she had with either of them to what
they had with each other. As she’d told Harry, what they had with one another was incomparable, not meant to be weighed against one another’s bonds. She could never compare to what Draco had with Theo because she wasn’t meant to and that was how it should be. Besides—Rome wasn’t built in a day. Intimacy in all its many forms would come with time and patience. A discovery she was looking forward to.

“To put a finer point on my mother’s invitation,” Draco continued. “She knows how I feel about you and historically, my mother has always made a point to care about the things I care about. I’m sure she’d genuinely like to make her own amends for the past few years, but more than anything, I have a feeling she wants to show you the side of her I know in the hope that you two might genuinely get along.”

She hadn’t planned on saying no, but now? Now she couldn’t, not when Draco made it sound as if denying Narcissa tea would be akin to refusing her olive branch. More, even, it sounded like Narcissa wanted to be, not just on cordial terms, but friendly ones. It was moments like these where sometimes she wondered if messing with time in third year had screwed with the entire continuum and landed her in some alternate reality. It was difficult to wrap her head around the idea of Narcissa wanting to be friends. Well, as much as one would be friends with their boyfriend’s mother.

Just as she hadn’t planned on saying no, she wasn’t going to laugh at the idea of being friendly with Draco’s mother because in the end, it was in her best interest to remain on the witch’s good side.

What a Slytherin thought. Maybe Draco and Theo were rubbing off on her a little.

“Like I said, I’ll owl her tomorrow.”

Draco continued to stroke his lips against the thin skin over her wrist, pressing a kiss there every so often. “Maybe after your tea, you can stay over. Spend the night. Have something to look forward to.”

“It’s not as if I don’t spend the night with you here,” she said.

Lacing their fingers together, Draco pressed their joined hands against the pillow beside her head, pinning her there. Her breath quickened, making him smirk. “Yes, but you haven’t seen my bathtub.”

His bathtub?

“There are bathtubs here,” she said, voice coming out breathier than she’d intended, but the way he was looking at her suddenly made it difficult to think straight.

Draco hummed, pursing his lips in consideration. “Bathtubs you’d let me shag you in?”

Her mouth went dry. “You want to shag me in your bath?”

Draco threw his leg over hers until he was leaning fully over her. Using those seeker reflexes of his, he snagged her other wrist and pinned it to the bed. She arched up, testing the strength of his hold, biting her lip to keep from groaning when his fingers tightened, keeping her from going anywhere. “My bathtub, my bed, in front of my fireplace. Broom cupboards and kitchens and in the gardens, too, quite frankly.”

She rolled her lips together and swallowed. “Oh?”
“Is that so hard to believe?” He lowered his face, his lips a centimeter from hers, so close she could feel his warm breath against her mouth. Before she could close the distance, he drew back, grinning when she huffed in frustration. “Maybe I don’t talk about it like Theo, but there really isn’t anywhere I don’t want to have you, where I haven’t thought about having you, Hermione.”

Draco dropped his hips, grinding his cock against her.

Gods, they were supposed to be putting the finishing touches on their runes project, not starting something she already ached to finish. But now that Draco had planted the thought inside her head, there’d be no way she could concentrate.

She groaned. “Draco.”

He smiled. “Yes? Is there something you want?”

“You’re sounding like Theo.”

He rocked against her again. It did nothing for friction, nothing to relieve the ache he’d sparked between her thighs all with a few words and by pinning her wrists. “You’re saying I don’t get to take a page out of his book and do something you like?” He tutted softly. “You know, it works in your favor that he and I discuss these sorts of things. Things that drive you crazy.”

They talked about that, the things she liked? Her face flamed. “You’re ganging up on me?”

Draco bit his lip, eyes darkening. “I’m not opposed to the idea, but trust me, Hermione, if Theo and I decide to gang up on you, you’ll know it.”

And he meant what by—oh.

It must’ve shown on her face, because Draco’s smile went curious, his gaze narrowing. “Do you like the thought of that?”

Did she even know what he meant? Well, she did, but…specifically? She’d certainly enjoyed Theo’s hands and lips on her when she’d ridden Draco, touching her, kissing her, but somehow she didn’t think that’s what he meant, or all he meant. How would that even work, Draco and Theo both…at once…wow, okay. If she wasn’t soaked already, she certainly was then.

She licked her lips. “Maybe?”

Draco hummed softly in response. “Let’s revisit that idea another time, shall we? Because right now”—he dropped his lips and kissed the spot behind her ear that made everything inside her melt—“I want to try something else.”

She flexed her fingers, aching to bury her hands in his hair, but he hadn’t let up on her wrists. His lips closed around her earlobe, teeth tugging gently on the skin and making her breath stutter. “Like?”

His tongue traced the shell of her ear, making her shiver. “You trust me?”

She nodded.

Draco lifted his head, looking her in the eye. “Just relax, okay?”

Easier said than done when she was aching so badly her body practically vibrated.

Nodding anyway, she took a measured breath in as Draco released her wrists and lifted off her,
slithering down the bed between her legs. He quickly divested her of her shoes, his fingers lingering briefly on the insides of her knees before he rolled her socks down her legs and off her feet. She lifted her bum when Draco tuck his fingers under the waist of her skirt, helping him slide it and her knickers over her hips and down her thighs.

Bare from the waist down, she lifted her fingers to the buttons on her shirt. She undid about half before Draco shook his head. “Leave it.”

Her brow furrowed, but she dropped her hands.

Cheeks reddening, Draco said, “There were a few months in fifth year when all your shirts got too tight.”

Merlin, she remembered that. It had been like one day everything fit, and the next day the buttons of her blouses strained against the chest she suddenly had.

“I—um.” Draco dropped his chin, laughing lightly. “I nearly wanked myself raw thinking about your tits.”

She bit the inside of her lip to keep from grinning. “Wouldn’t you rather look at them?”

Her heart was pounding so hard, she could see the actual fluttery rise and fall of her chest as she trailed her fingers across the cups of her bra, where the fabric met her flesh.

Draco’s eyes tracked the movement, a low groan falling from his lips. He shook his head. “It makes me think about when I could look, but I couldn’t touch. Not that I was supposed to be looking back then, either.”

When he put it like that, being covered, at least partially was arousing. She dropped her hands to her sides. “Is this something else you want to try, something you thought about? Back then?”

There was a glint in his eye that made her clench. “I didn’t learn about this until the summer after fifth year, so no. But after I did? Definitely.”

Something he had to learn? Heaven help her.

Draco leaned in and kissed her knee before pressing against her legs, urging her to part them further. “Relax, remember?”

She nodded, digging her head in against the pillow until she was comfortable. From beneath her lashes she watched as Draco slid his hands up the insides of her thighs, his hands warm against her skin. So far this was nothing new, not even when he parted her lips and trailed his fingers through her wetness. He groaned softly under his breath as he slid two fingers inside her, her walls clenching down around him without her meaning to.

Leaning in, he kissed the thin skin over her hip, over to the tender place where her leg met her body, but no lower, no closer to where she wished he’d put his mouth.

“Draco,” she murmured, hips rocking forward.

He chuckled softly and kissed her again in the same spot, but shook his head. “I said relax.”

She huffed, but dropped her head back, having craned her neck to watch.

So achingly slow that she wanted to scream, Draco withdrew his fingers before sliding them back
in, his fingertips alighting on that bundle of nerves inside her that made her breath catch loudly in
her throat. He grinned against her hip and curled his fingers, crooking them slightly before
pressing, thrusting hard against the spot without ever withdrawing his fingers from her cunt.

“Oh.” The word fell off her tongue, more of a sound than anything else.

The sensation Draco was invoking with each hard, ever-quickening curl of his fingers was both
wonderful and strange. Almost as if he’d found her override switch, his fingers were drawing out
reactions she couldn’t control, the muscles in her thighs twitching, her toes curling, calf muscles
and stomach spasming. Deep jolts of pleasure licked up her spine as her lashes fluttered and a
foreign pressure bloomed inside her.

So much pressure. It was like each curl of his fingers made her insides more swollen, the way his
fingers moved causing an absolutely filthy slick sound that made her flush all the way to the roots
of her hair.

Her hands clenched the sheet, tangling them between her fingers, needing to hold on to something
as he pressed and pressed and—


He froze, wide silver eyes darkened to smoke gray meeting hers. “I didn’t hurt you did I?”

She shook her head. Her thighs were still shaking and she hadn’t even come. Thankfully the
pressure had abated a bit when Draco had stopped moving his hand.

“Are you okay?” he asked, his brow puckered in what looked like concern. He removed his
fingers, making her bite her lip.

Merlin, this was mortifying. She unstuck her tongue from the roof of her mouth and licked her lips.

“I—”

Nope, she couldn’t say it.

Draco frowned sharply. “Hermione.”

Apparently she was going to have to say it. She brought her hand to her cheek. She was on fire. “I
—I think I need to use the loo.”

For a moment, all Draco did was stare. Slowly, his lips twitched, his frown morphing into a grin
which did wonders for her mortification. Gods, she’d never been so humiliated in her life. She
buried her face in her hands and clenched her burning eyes shut.

“Hermione. Hermione, love, stop it. Move your hands.”

She shook her head. She was just going to go ahead and die like this, thank you very much.

Only Draco was having none of it. His hand tugged on her arm until she reluctantly uncovered her
face. His grin had softened into something sweet that did nothing to quell her embarrassment. “I
don’t mean to laugh, but you’re fine.”

She scoffed, because it was either that or cry.

Draco huffed. “You said you trust me, right?”

And that had what to do with any of this? She rolled her eyes. “Yes. So?”

“You don’t need the loo, love.”
Her brow furrowed, slight indignation warring with embarrassment. Was she really supposed to justify this? “Excuse me, but I do.” She frowned. “Or, I did.”

He opened his mouth only to pause, the crests of his cheeks darkening before he took a breath and tried again. “It felt good, right?”

She nodded.

“What did it feel like?” he asked.

“Really?” She huffed.

He shook his head, cheeks still flushed. “Before you had me stop.”

Why did it matter what it felt like? She’d suggest she just get up and use the loo, but for some reason she didn’t need to anymore. Plus, Draco was looking at her like he was desperate to know. She shrugged. “There was a lot of…pressure.”

Draco dropped his eyes and bit his lip like he was trying not to smile. When he glanced back up, his cheeks were still red but his eyes were bright. “Okay, so, summer after fifth year, Blaise spent half the break in France. He was seeing this girl who went to Beauxbatons, and he told us about how sometimes when she came, she’d—”

She shook her head. “She’d what?”

Draco cleared his throat. “She’d…squirt.”

The blood all either rushed to her head or away from it, but either way it left her dizzy. “What?”

He chuckled, not meanly, but honestly like he was a little shy. “Female ejaculation. He told us about it and then I—I read up on it. Where I was pressing, it’s erectile tissue, you know? And there’s—honestly, describing it doesn’t sound nearly as hot as what it really is which is basically making you come so hard you can’t see straight.”

And why exactly had no one ever told her that apparently her body could do this? And it was—normal? Her brain caught on the last part of what he said. “So you want me to—”

“Come all over my hand?” He arched a brow, the edges of his lips curling slightly. “Yes. I haven’t done this, but the thought of making you come so hard you gush is…” He sat up, gesturing to —wow. His cock was straining the fabric of his trousers and there was a very small damp spot over his head where he was leaking. He chuckled breathlessly. “So ridiculously hot that I’m worried I might go off without you even touching me.”

Oh.

“But if you don’t want to, I can get you off like normal.” He shrugged, smiling softly. “Or if you do, and you don’t like it, we don’t have to do it again. I honestly just want to make you feel good. And if you happen to scream my name, no complaints.”

She bit the inside of her cheek. It had felt good, ridiculously good. Gods, she’d hardly been able to think and that was—wonderful. And if it turned him on, which it clearly did, maybe she could try and like he said, if she didn’t like it… “Okay.”

“Yes?”
She nodded.

His face practically split in two with the size of his grin. She snorted softly.

Draco stretched up, kissing her soundly on the mouth, his lips still curled in a smile. It was infectious, her own lips curving gently.

“Just relax, okay?” he reminded.

She hummed. At least now she knew what to expect.

Sliding back down her body, Draco kissed her hip once more. Only this time he trailed his kisses lower, his tongue briefly flicking against her clit in a move that made her jolt, her nerves electrified, before she sank down into the mattress. He only did it the one time, but it renewed the ache between her thighs with a vengeance.

She was still wet, Draco’s fingers sliding back inside her cunt with ease. She took a deep breath, bracing herself for the—Merlin, he hadn’t even had to look for that spot inside her. His fingers curled against it, pressing deep and fast and hard enough to snatch her breath, the pressure building so much faster than before, almost like her body had merely pressed pause instead of stop.

Her fingers scrambled against the sheets, clenching the soft cotton between her knuckles as the pleasurable pressure reached that same fever pitch and the need, whatever it was for, returned. She whimpered. “Draco.”

He kissed the skin of her hip and shushed her gently. “You’re so gorgeous, love. So fucking perfect, just relax, just let it happen. I’ve got you, okay?”

If possible his fingers flew faster, the pads of his fingers pressing harder and quicker against that place inside her until she couldn’t take any more of it. The pressure was too much, too good, that—

Everything inside her drew up tight, so tight, and then, all at once she snapped, the pressure releasing rhythmically as her vision went dark and Draco swore, “Fuck.”

The pleasure felt mostly the same, mind-bendingly amazing as usual, but rooted deeper. And then there was new, strange but not unpleasant sensation of extreme wetness between her thighs, wetness that intensified with each pulse of her orgasm, liquid dripping down her crack and seeping into the mattress.

Draco’s fingers continued to press, the sound of his hand moving slick and primal in a way she hadn’t anticipated being as hot as it was. After a moment is became too much but—Gods, she could barely move, definitely couldn’t feel her legs, so she lifted her hand and swatted at his arm until he got the hint and quit moving.

Her pulse was thundering inside her head, nearly drowning out the sound of her noisy, panting breaths. Merlin, that was—

“Are you okay?”

She blinked hard. “What?”

Her throat was scratchy, raw, like she’d—Gods, had she screamed after all?

Draco was staring at up her, his expression torn between concern and supreme satisfaction. His brow was furrowed, but his eyes were bright. “I asked if you were all right.”
“Oh.” She shook her head. “No. I mean, yes. I’m fine. I think? Are you?”

His lips twitched. “I’ve never been better.”

She cleared her throat. “Did I…?”

Draco licked his bottom lip and nodded, his eyes flashing between her splayed thighs and her face. “You did.”

Wow. “And was it…?”

He grinned. “The single sexiest thing I’ve seen? Definitely. Theo’s going to be so pissed he missed this.”

She laughed. That probably meant Theo would want to try, which she wasn’t going to complain about, not after having experienced that. “Really? It…turned you on?”

He nodded. “I’ve never been this hard in my life.”

He really was, his cock straining the fabric of his trousers to the point where being confined had to be painful. She hummed and reached out, hands beckoning. “Come here, then.”

“Are you sure?” he asked, fingers already dropping down to the button of his pants.

She nodded, spreading her thighs slightly to show him she meant it.

Draco slid his trousers and shorts off, hissing as the fabric grazed his cock. He was so hard his cock was nearly red, the head engorged and dripping. He grabbed his wand and cast the charm quickly before he settled between her thighs, grimacing slightly. “I’m not going to last.”

She shook her head. She didn’t care. “I don’t think I can again, but I want you to.”

Brow furrowed and lips rolled together, Draco pressed against her entrance, breath whistling through his teeth as he slipped inside. She was still swollen, but so wet it made up for the difference, easing the friction as he thrust with slow, measured rolls of his hips.

It felt good, even though there wasn’t a chance she’d come again, not after that. She was wrung out, but not too sensitive, and she wasn’t disappointed because this way she got to look at him, catalogue the expressions his face ran through as he chased his pleasure, finding it between her thighs.

Before long his hips stuttered, his jaw clenching as the tendons in his neck stood out in stark relief. His lips parted on a near silent moan, his eyes locking on hers as he fell apart, his cock twitching subtly inside her.

Maybe the timing was odd, but something about the moment was so intimate, so raw that she couldn’t deny the feeling that had been creeping up on her.

Her heart fluttered inside her chest, hummingbird fast as she smiled up at him and with trembling fingers brushed the hair out of his eyes. He smiled back and lifted his hand, running his thumb along her cheek. “Hey, Granger?”

She hummed softly.

“Don’t hex me, okay?”
“Why?”
“I love you.”

Talk about being in sync. He whispered it like a confession, but his voice didn’t waver, nor did the expression on his face. It was a confession and promise and the honest to goodness truth and it flooded her chest with liquid warmth so hot she nearly pressed her hand to her chest to check and see if she was bleeding.

She swallowed over the lump in her throat. “Is that the reason you’re worried I’d hex you or the reason why I shouldn’t?”

He laughed, breathless, eyes roving over her face rapidly, so obviously trying to read her. “Both, I think.”

“Draco?”

He swallowed. “Yes?”

She smiled. “I love you, too.”

Draco’s look of wide-eyed awe nearing on disbelief almost moved her to tears, but she bit the inside of her cheek. It did however move her to something else, a subtle realization, a slotting of puzzle pieces into their rightful places. Nothing that felt this right could be wrong, and she’d face her friends, Draco’s mother, the Manor and the memories that lied within, as long it meant she’d get to keep this, Draco, Theo, the both of them.
Chapter Eighteen

“Give me the paper, Hermione.”

Her gaze bounced between Theo’s outstretched hand and the parchment in front of her. “I think we should double check it one more time.”

“Double check it? We’ve read over the blasted translation at least half a dozen times in the last week.” Draco rubbed the corners of his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose.

She bit her lip. This assignment counted for the majority of their grade in the class. Not to mention it was wonderful preparation for their N.E.W.Ts. Just one more read through wouldn’t hurt, would —

Theo snatched the parchment away before she could grab for it. “Ah ah. I could practically hear you thinking just one more time.”

“One more time wouldn’t hurt,” she argued, crossing her arms.

“Speak for yourself,” Draco grumbled. “I’m literally dreaming in runes, Granger. And trust me, there’s plenty I’d rather dream about.”

Theo cocked his head. “I wonder. Do you think there’s a runic sequence for tight little—”

“Theo!” she snapped.

Chuckling, he tucked the stack of parchment away inside his bag, out of sight, as if that would put it out of her mind. He turned back to the table and shrugged at her glare. “It’s done. We’re finished. Another read through isn’t going to do anything but drive you out of your mind. It’s perfect.”

Nice try, but… “You and I both know translations are never perfect, Theo. They’re inherently imperfect.”

“Even better. If perfection isn’t attainable, we’ve certainly come close enough for Professor Babbling’s standards. I’m sure of it.”

She sighed. Maybe they were right. How many errors could she possibly have missed, could they have missed? And even if there were errors, what were the chances of her discovering them now, on one more read through? Slim, honestly. “Fine. You have to admit, it’s a little odd. Being done.”

They’d spent months on the project. Merlin, it was responsible for shoving them together, giving them a reason to spend time together in the first place. It wasn’t just odd being through with the project, it was...she was feeling a little sentimental. That was it.

“Just think,” Theo said. “No more project means more—”

“Time to study for our N.E.W.Ts?” She struggled not to crack up when Theo’s face fell.

Draco chuckled under his breath and shook his head slowly. “Gods, how did we not see that coming?”

Theo grabbed Draco’s hand, lacing their fingers together with a smile. “I think what Draco and I are suggesting is that without the project, we can spend more time outside the library.”
She stared.

“Who are we kidding?” Draco looked at Theo and smirked. “We knew exactly what we were getting ourselves into.”

“True.” Theo nodded. “Her swotty personality is half her appeal.”

“You do realize, I’m sitting right here?” She paused. “Wait, what’s the other half of my appeal?”

Draco and Theo’s eyes dropped to her chest in tandem.

“Hey!” She laughed. “I have a half a mind to charm your arses stuck to your chairs. Try leaving the library glued to your seats.”

“Hermione,” Theo drew out her name, a sure sign that he was about to lay it on thick. “We have months to study for our exams. Do we really need to start now?”

She pursed her lips. “Is that a legitimate question?”

Theo groaned, while Draco simply shook his head in clear exasperation.

“Now, hold on,” she said, sitting up and leaning her elbows across the table. Ever since Draco’s little confession about how her ill-fitting shirts in fifth year had driven him mad, she’d taken to charming her current set of shirts just a little tighter in the bosom. Not enough to be indecent, no. Only enough that if she leaned forward just so, the buttons right over her breasts would pull a bit. Apparently the effect was appreciated as both Theo and Draco’s eye flitted to her chest and hovered there. She bit back a smile. “You haven’t even heard my methodology for revisions.”

“Oh?” Draco asked, eyes still locked on her chest.

She grinned. “Your focus and time would be…rewarded.”

That got their attention. Draco’s tongue poked the side of his cheek as he arched a brow and Theo dimpled. Theo hummed eagerly. “Rewarded, you say? And what pray tell do you mean by that?”

Wasn’t the insinuation enough? “I suppose whatever you need to incentivize you.”

Theo’s teeth snagged on his bottom lip as he groaned softly. “That’s a dangerous proposition, love. What if I intend to hold you to that?”

Okay, on second thought, this plan of hers wasn’t working in her favor. She’d meant to tease them. Talk about an idea backfiring. She shrugged, aiming for disaffected rather than dreadfully aroused, though the flush in her cheeks was probably a dead giveaway. “I’d expect nothing else.”

Draco chuckled darkly. “Remember how I keep warning you that Theo will take a mile when given an inch? Gods, I’m going to love telling you I told you so.”

“He’s not wrong.” Theo grinned.

She shook her head. “I’m hearing an awful lot of talk…”

“Oh.” Theo laughed, his teeth bright and white against the dangerous pink curve of his mouth. “I’m going to make you eat those words, witch.”

***
With a sigh, Hermione flipped to the next page of her Transfiguration text. She’d already read the section on non-verbal untransfiguration spells front to back, but it was a rather intricate branch of transfiguration, one that required a degree of focus and practice to understand let alone master. Difficult though it was, it was certainly a worthwhile area of magic to hone as untransfiguring oneself verbally would not always be possible, in an instance where the original transfiguration, say, did away with one’s mouth. Or if one needed to force an animagus out of its animal form sneakily. Trapping Rita Skeeter in a jar had been sufficient payback at the time, but having the ability to out her publicly was a skill she’d like to have in her back pocket should the need ever arise.

Quill in hand poised to jot down any notes on the subject she might’ve missed, she glanced up to see how Theo was faring on his studies. He’d been quiet, though apparently he hadn’t been studying transfiguration as much as he’d been studying her because his textbook wasn’t even open. He stared across the table, an amused little smile gracing his face.

“THEO,” she chastised. “We’re supposed to be working.”

“Who says I haven’t been?” he asked, sounding affronted even if the smile on his face was a dead giveaway.

She dropped her eyes to his shut textbook and stared at it meaningfully before lifting her eyes to his. “Your book is closed, so unless you’ve acquired x-ray vision, I’m going to have to cry foul.”

“X-what?” he asked, brows furrowing in slight confusion.

She shook her head, laughing lightly. “Never mind. Just start now because I plan to quiz you at the end of the hour.”

Theo slid his chair back and kicked his heels up on his desk, making her scowl. The library had been crowded, their private table actually taken by a group of frantic fourth year Ravenclaws preparing for a Charms exam, so they’d taken up in a secluded classroom on the opposite side of the castle near the Divination tower. But just because no one was likely to stumble upon didn’t mean he needed to put his boots all over the tables.

“Weren’t you supposed to be—what was it you said? Incentivizing me to study?” he asked, clasping his hands over his stomach.

“That was meant to reward good behavior.” She set her quill aside and folded her arms atop the table. “Seeing as how you haven’t even cracked open your textbook or jotted down a single note, I fail to see how there’s anything to reward.”

Theo narrowed his blue eyes, the left corner of his mouth twitching. “Quiz me now.”

“Now? But you haven’t even begun to—”

“Just do it, Hermione,” he said, shifting in his seat, looking awfully comfortable and even smugger.

Oh, she knew that look. Theo had something up his sleeve—okay, he always had something up his sleeve—but she couldn’t figure out what. Even as naturally adept at Transfiguration as Theo was, there was no way he could have a firm grasp on the topic of human untransfiguration, not without having studied.

“Fine.” What to ask, what to ask—ah, perfect. “Under what circumstance will even a successfully cast revelio not untransfigure a transfigured subject into its original form?”
Theo’s lips curled in a slow smirk. “When the original form is both human and unknown. A poor guess at the subject’s original form could leave the subject stuck in an irreversible transfigured state caught between the original form, the first transfigured form, and the form the caster intended to untransfigure the subject into. It can be quite lethal. Next question?”

A trick up his sleeve, indeed. “You’ve already studied this, haven’t you?”

“You know what they say about assumptions.” Theo grinned.

“Seeing as someone”—he shot her a muted glare—“had rounds last night and Draco was at practice and then had a meeting for a potions project, I had a fair amount of time on my hands. There’s only so much a bloke can wank before it’s depressing.”

She shook her head, unable to keep from smiling. “And yet here you led me to believe you’d been slacking off.”

“You know what they say about assumptions.” Theo grinned.

**Such** a handful. A cunning handful, to boot. He’d completely turned her plan on its head, taking back control of the situation. “What am I going to do with you?”

“Reward me?” he suggested, eyes widening in the most insincere display of innocence she’d ever seen.

Well, she had promised, but she wasn’t nearly through with her own revisions. She worried the inside of her lip, torn between the two warring impulses.

“Come on, Hermione.” Theo slipped his feet off his desk and leaned forward. “You’ve been working so hard. I think you deserve a break.”

“I thought this was supposed to be about rewarding you, not me.”

Theo trailed his fingers along the edge of the desk and hummed softly. “Who says those are mutually exclusive?” He pinned her with a stare she couldn’t have looked away from had she wanted, which *Merlin*, she didn’t, not when he could stoke a fire inside her with his eyes alone. “I can promise you I’d very much enjoy rewarding you for your good behavior.”

His dark, sapphire eyes left hers as he stared rather meaningfully down at the table between them for a long moment before flicking his gaze back to her, one brow arched slightly.

Her insides clenched, blood heating and skin flushing at that significant look. She’d have to be obliviated to forget Theo’s words, his confession that he wanted to bend her over a desk and fuck her hoarse, and even then, they’d probably still live inside her, branded into her very being.

Maybe it was the way she bit her lip or how her breath had quickened, but Theo’s eyes darkened, his smile turning feline and his voice sultry. “You’re thinking about it, aren’t you?”

She swallowed over the growing lump in her throat and nodded.

“So you want it?” His tongue flicked out, wetting his bottom lip.

For all the times Theo had gotten her off, and it had been plenty, he had yet to actually shag her. Not that she could complain, not when he’d made her come with his ridiculously talented hands and mouth more times than she could count. And he didn’t seem to mind, either, not with the number of times she’d eagerly returned the favor. But in the month and a half that they’d been together, they hadn’t had sex, not like *that*. 
The question of whether she wanted it was absurd. It wasn’t as if Draco treated her like spun glass—no, she was more than satisfied with how he shagged her—but Theo had promised her something else, unbridled fucking, rough and fevered. To ask if she wanted it, wanted him and everything he had to offer was laughable, and she’d have done so had she not been so close to trembling with the ferocity of her desire. She nodded once more.

“Tell me,” Theo demanded.

“I want it,” she whispered. “I want you.”

Theo bit the swell of his bottom lip and smiled. “Then be a good girl and stand up.”

Knees already stupidly weak, Hermione pushed her chair back and stood, hands resting on the edge of the desk for stability more than anything.

Theo took his time, standing slowly, his fingers grazing the perimeter of the table as he circled it. Each step he took toward her ratcheted up her heart beat, her pulse racing by the time he stopped behind her, just over her shoulder, close enough to feel the heat rolling off him without actually touching. With careful fingers he swept aside her hair, brushing it over her right shoulder. He leaned in, lips brushing against the shell of her left ear. “Do you want me to fuck you, Hermione?”

“Yes,” she breathed, lashes fluttering as she fought against the impulse to drop her eyes to the table, the intensity of this new desire making her something close to shy.

In a quick move, he seized her chin and tugged her head to the side, forcing her to look at him over her shoulder. “Say please.”

She swallowed, pulse skipping in her throat. “Please, Theo.”

Wandlessly and wordlessly, Theo locked the door and cast a silencing spell over the room. Maybe it was strange, but his show of skill made her whimper, made her wet.

Theo hummed, the sound sending shivers down her spine. “I’m going to take such good care of you, love.”

Down to her bones, she believed him.

Dropping his hand from her jaw, he gripped her hips, holding her tightly as he slipped a leg between her knees and knocked a foot against the inside of hers. Taking the hint, she spread her feet, gasping when he pressed against her back, bending her over the table. Her hands scrambled against the smooth surface of the wood, fingers clutching the opposite edge as Theo’s hands left her hips and slipped under her skirt, squeezing her arse.

With Theo behind her, she couldn’t see what he was doing, and it certainly didn’t help that he was so bloody capable of keeping quiet when he moved. All she had to go off of was the feel of his hands tracing the curve of her bum, teasing, dipping close to the space between her legs, but not close enough.

Suddenly Theo’s hands were gone, the warmth of them replaced with the cool chill of the air as he lifted her skirt, tucking the hem of it into her waistband, baring her arse save for her knickers and those were only a scrap of lace. A scrap of lace Theo must’ve appreciated because he groaned, deep and desperate and then—

“Oh my Gods.” She jerked, Theo’s mouth suddenly between her legs, his breath hot and damp against her core.
He chuckled against her, his fingers dipping under the lace of her knickers. He tugged them not down, but to the side. His laughter morphed into another groan, this one breathless. “Salazar’s rod, you’re dripping, love.”

She arched her back, shoving her hips back, seeking his touch, wanting him to do something, anything. “Theo, please.”

She held her breath, Theo’s penchant for making her extrapolate upon her desires seared into her mind. *Please, what, Hermione?* That was what she expected him to say, so when he didn’t, when he instead ran his tongue up her slit, she jerked hard, hips knocking into the table.

“Might want to hold on,” he said, before he grabbed her hips, the span of his hands wide as his thumbs parted her folds, holding her open.

His mouth was back on her, kissing her core, tongue dipping briefly inside her, curling, but not deep enough. He avoided her clt, barely nudging the bottom of the nub before darting away at the first sound of her gasping, sucking at one of her lower lips and then the other, giving her just enough pleasure to drive her out of her mind, but not enough to drive her over the edge. _Teasing_. Frustrated didn’t begin to cut it.

_“Theo,”_ she whined, pressing back against his face.

Teeth bit into the swell of her arse making her gasp. Theo chuckled darkly. “What did I say, love?”

She shook her head. *Hold on?* And before that—oh. She licked her lips, mouth dry as she panted. “That you’ll take care of me?”

Theo tutted softly. “I said I’ll take such _good_ care of you. You trust me to do that don’t you?”

She hissed through her teeth when he bit her again on the opposite cheek, hard enough to sting, maybe even enough to leave a mark. The temptation to bring her legs closer so she could rub them together was strong, the press of his teeth against her flesh making her dizzy with desire, making her drip.

“Yes,” she murmured. “I do.”

Two of Theo’s fingers slipped through her folds, sliding inside of her. He thrust them lazily inside her cunt, slow little thrusts that made her curl her toes inside her shoes to keep from squirming and pressing back against his hand. “Have I ever left you unsatisfied, Hermione?”

“No,” she said, voice trembling.

Theo’s fingers sped, curling down against that spot inside her, making her whimper.

“Why would I start now, hmm?” Theo asked, and though she couldn’t see him she couldn’t certainly imagine the wicked smirk on his face. “Besides, getting you off is one of my favorite things to do. Why would I deny myself the pleasure?”

He pressed harder, faster, his thumb reaching down to brush her clt. Sharp frissons of pleasure crackled from her core as he drove her steadily toward the edge.

“One day”—Theo pressed a kiss to the flesh of her bum over the spot he’d last bitten—“I’d love nothing more than to see how many times I can get you off in a row. Between Draco and me, I wonder if we could make you pass out.”
Holy fuck. She clenched the edge of the wooden table and pressed her face into the crook of her elbow, biting her lip hard to keep from crying out. Between the way he was touching her and the things he was saying, the idea of him and Draco making her come until she couldn’t take it anymore was—Merlin, she didn’t have the brain capacity to handle that.

“Would you like that?” Theo continued to fuck her with his fingers, his lips planting a trail of kisses against the skin of her rear. “Us making you come so many times you can’t stand it?”

There was something so deliciously dirty about that, Theo pushing her limits, giving her more pleasure than she could stand. She whimpered loudly and rocked back against his hand. “Yes.”

Theo’s trail of kisses veered to where his fingers were thrusting. He dipped his tongue briefly inside her before licking a path from her cunt all the way up to her—fuck. Warm and wet, Theo’s tongue swept right over her arsehole, pressing just a little and—

A choked whimper fell off her tongue, muscles clenching around Theo’s fingers as she shattered.

“That’s it,” Theo soothed, fingers thrusting a few more times before he removed them, leaving her empty and clenching desperately around nothing. “See, I told you I’d take care of you.”

Arms trembling, she looked over her shoulder. Theo’s eyes were dark, his smile decadent and smug as he stared at her. She raised her chin defiantly. “I thought you said you were going to bend me over a desk and—and fuck me hoarse.”

He cut his eyes, and the look of warning in them made her slowing pulse gallop. “Maybe instead of seeing how many times I can make you come in a row, I should instead aim to see how many times I can bring you right to the brink without giving in. Maybe get you so close you can taste it, make your thighs tremble and your pretty toes curl and then just stop and deny you the satisfaction of coming.”

She swallowed tightly and shook her head. That sounded awful, so terrible she had to blink fast.

His eyes softened. “No? I suppose I won’t have to do that since you’re such a good girl, aren’t you, love?”

She nodded, heart racing and muscles quivering as renewed heat pooled low in her gut. “Yes.”

Theo reached out, brushed a stray curl from her forehead. “Gods, you’re precious.” He took a tremulous breath in and smiled, the dimple in his left cheek visible. “You have no idea how badly I want to wreck you.”

“Theo.” She was liable to combust if he didn’t do it, no more teasing.

He must’ve realized it because he nodded and dropped his hand from her cheek to the button on his trousers. Rather than shove them down, he tugged them just low enough to free his cock. He didn’t touch himself, rather carefully avoided touching himself as he gripped her hips, angling her arse up. She bowed her back, her breaths coming out in eager pants.

One whispered charm later and Theo was running the head of his cock through her folds. She clenched and quivered in anticipation.

“You’re sure?” he whispered.

She nodded. “Yes.”
The word was scarcely past her lips before he snapped his hips, stretching and filling her in one powerful thrust. Her fingers scrambled for purchase against the wood as Theo gave her not even a moment to catch her breath before he set up a furious pace, each drive of his cock knocking the air from her lungs. His hips smacked against her arse and his bollocks slapped against her clit with each angled thrust, the head of his cock pressing against that spot within her perfectly.

She’d never been so close to coming so fast, so close that just a few more thrusts and—

“THEO,” she cried out, knees trembling as she clenched around his cock, her vision darkening as she shut her eyes against the torrent of pleasure.

Fingers tangled in her curls, tugging her head back, yanking her up and away from the table top, her back arching as Theo fucked her steadily though the aftershocks. One solid arm banded around her just beneath her breasts, holding her up against his chest. His breath was hot and damp against her neck, the shell of her ear. “Fucking addicting, the feeling of you coming on my cock. Hell, Hermione, I’m never going to get enough of this. Never going to get enough of you. F**k.”

His hips snapped hard, his cock hitting her over and over again in all the right places, places she didn’t know she had. Biting her lip couldn’t keep the sounds clawing their way up her throat at bay. Thank Merlin he’d silenced the room or else she might’ve brought the castle down with the noises he was drawing from her.

“Gonna come again for me, love?” he asked, barely sounding out of breath as if this wasn’t taxing at all. “What do you need? You need me to fuck you harder?”

He tugged on her hair, just enough to make her blood sing and to make her gasp loudly. The pace he’d set wasn’t conducive to kissing, but he licked the shell of her ear as he drove his hips hard. This was—this was—

Her eyes rolled back, vision blacking, her knees almost giving out entirely as her muscles clenched so tight Theo made a choked sound as she came. Had it not been for his arm holding her up, holding her against him, she’d have collapsed.

“Oh, fucking hell.” Theo grunted, *finally* sounding affected. “You’re so bloody tight, strangling my cock with your perfect little cunt. Fucking greedy for it, aren’t you? Dying for me to fill you up.”

He punctuated each word with a hard thrust, the sound of skin slapping sweat-damp skin loud in the room.

The hand that had been clutching her hair snaked its way between her thighs beneath her skirt, his fingers circling her clit. She shook her head, little whimpers she couldn’t control slipping out from between her lips. Too much. “I can’t. Not again.”

He’d made her come three times. It was a miracle she was still standing. Four might very well do her in.

Theo bit off his own groan, the sound desperate and hot and fucking feral. The arm banded around her waist shifted until his hand rested against the base of her throat, his fingers lightly pressed against the skin of her neck. His voice rumbled through his chest against her back. “Please, love. Give me another. Just one more.”

She choked out a sob of pleasure, the feeling of him fucking her so good it almost hurt. Anything he asked, she’d likely agree to, agree to it gladly. She nodded, head bobbing against him.

Suddenly he was shifting her, the arm around her torso releasing her, urging her back down to the
table. Then his hand was grabbing her knee, lifting it up to the table’s edge, opening her deeper, so bloody deep, his cock driving hard and fast into her, his fingers stroking her quick and sure as he shoved her to the edge and over, her muscles locking and spasming as she clenched her eyes shut and rode it out.

“Hermione.” He groaned, fingers digging hard into her hips as he went still, buried deep inside her as he came.

There was no way she wasn’t going to have bruises after that. Bruises she’d rather enjoy looking at in the mirror, tracing with her fingers. Had Draco looked at his rug burns with affection? She snorted.

Theo chuckled. “You okay there, love?”

She hummed, cheek plastered against the desk. “Mhmm.”

Theo slipped out of her, making her whimper at the loss. Fortunately, he made up for it by gathering her up in his arms and hauling her into his lap as he collapsed into the chair she’d sat in earlier. He tucked her head against his neck and she breathed deep, inhaling the musky smell of sweat and sex and cloves clinging to him and the air around them. Her brain was foggy, her muscles limp, and his scent and the warmth of his hand stroking down her back were the only things she really noticed. It took a moment to register that he was speaking.

“—so perfect. Like you were made for me, you know? Me and Draco, made for us. We fit. You feel it, right? Not just when we’re fucking, but the rest of the time, too. Like a tug here”—Theo tapped the space over her heart—“and here”—another tap, lower, just beneath her belly button—“right? You feel that, don’t you?”

She blinked away the fog. Yes, she knew that feeling, that pull that on occasion took her breath away, had even before they were together. She nodded. “I do.”

Theo stroked her arm, the outside of her thigh, everywhere he could reach like he couldn’t stop touching her. “Compatible magic. My magic likes your magic, just like yours likes mine and Draco’s and his yours and mine.” He chuckled. “Bet you could even use my wand if you wanted.”

That was—Merlin. That was big and yet it wasn’t as difficult to swallow or wrap her head around as she’d have thought. It should’ve been scary, terrifying, but after everything she’d been through, the suggestion wasn’t as daunting a prospect as it could’ve been, not in light of all the other realizations she’d made in the last few months that led to this moment.

If anything, her magic had been the only consistent in her life since the age of eleven, something she’d been able to rely on in even the darkest of times. If she could trust anything, it was the magic inside her. And Theo was right. A moment of quiet reflection, digging deep and tapping into the core that housed her magic made it clear—something inside her reached for Theo and for Draco, too.

Suddenly Theo laughed. “I mean, I guess you did just use my wand.”

He waggled his brows and she smacked his arm, face heating. “Prat.”

Theo caught her hand and brought it to his mouth where he pressed a kiss to the inside of her palm. His eyes sparkled. “Anyway. Your first rough shag against a desk. Not your last?”

She shook her head. “Definitely not.”
“I suppose I’d be willing to oblige you again sometime,” he said, voice teasing. He shut his eyes and in that blink he’d sobered, his smiling turning soft. “I am glad, though. That you enjoyed it.”

She’d grown adept at reading the subtle shifts in Theo’s moods, at picking up on the ability to hear what he wasn’t saying, the vulnerability behind his humor.

She smiled and squeezed his hand. “Desks, or beds, or up against bookshelves, I don’t care. You make it perfect, Theo. You, you and Draco, make me happier than I thought was possible after everything.”

Theo appeared to struggle to swallow, his eyes staring hard at her fingers clasped in his. He cleared his throat. “Bookshelves, oh?”

She bit her lip and grinned. “Definitely bookshelves.”
Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Notes

I really hope you all enjoy this chapter! It was one of my favorites to write (in addition to the next chapter :))

Again, thank you all for reading!

Hermione glared at the stone fireplace of 12 Grimmauld Place.

She could do this. She would do this.

Any moment now…

Her shoulders slumped on a groan. Throw the powder, step inside, say the location, poof. Merlin, she’d done it more times than she could count. Not that she loved traveling by Floo, but it wasn’t the process she dreaded.

Malfoy Manor.

Never had she traveled there, not on purpose, and that was the sticking point. Speaking of sticking, the powder pinched between her fingers had started to clump from the dampness of her hands. Stupid nerves manifesting in the least ideal ways. Surreptitiously, she lifted an elbow, checking her underarms. At least that charm had stuck. The last thing she needed was to sweat through her robes and greet Narcissa Malfoy with pit stains.

Three loud chimes sounded from the clock above the mantel. The second to last thing she needed was to be late after she’d expressly told Narcissa she’d her availability. Stepping into the fireplace, Hermione tossed the Floo powder to the ground. “Malfoy Manor.”

A flash of green and a whooshing sensation later, Hermione staggered slightly as she stepped out of the fireplace and on to the marble floor before the hearth.

“Careful.” Two arms gathered her slightly, setting her to rights. Draco smiled down at her. “You made it.”

Call it a hunch, but it wasn’t likely Draco was speaking to the efficacy of the Floo Network. Her lips quirked to the side ruefully. “It was touch and go for a moment.”

A throat cleared from over Draco’s shoulder as Theo stepped into view. Lifting his finger to his nose and tapping it gently, he grinned. “You’ve got a little something…”

“Oh.” She rifled in her pocket for her wand and cast a quick scourgify to get rid of the soot. “Better?”

Theo nodded. “Not that it wasn’t cute, mind you.”

“Well, thank you anyway,” she said, tucking her wand away once more. “Covered in soot wasn’t exactly how I wanted to greet Narcissa.”
Speaking of which, where was Draco’s mother? For that matter, where was she? She took a moment to look around, steeling herself carefully.

Merlin, Draco was right. The place was different. Walls covered in cream wallpaper with a subtle champagne-colored damask design converged into a lofty, arched ceiling—an enchanted ceiling, it appeared, as the painting swirled and danced above them. Three sparkling chandeliers bathed the room in a warm glow that brought out the flecks of gold in the marble floor. The place was breathtaking and not at all what she’d expected.

“What do you think?” Draco tucked his hands inside his pockets and rocked back on his heels. “Different, no?”

“It’s…” She spun in a circle, taking it all in. “Are you certain this is the same place?”

Theo and Draco both laughed.

“Quite certain,” Draco said.

“When you said airy, I was thinking—”

“Drafty?” Theo chuckled.

She shook her head. “I don’t know what I was thinking, but this is a bit more Rococo than I had imagined. In a good way, I mean.”

A little ornate for her taste, perhaps, but it was hard to go minimalist with a space this size without it looking barren.

Draco inclined his head. “A nod to our French roots, I imagine was my mother’s thinking. The art upon the ceiling tells the tale of how Salazar Slytherin and several other families, mine included, migrated from Normandy in the Eleventh century. “

Craning her neck to stare above, she teased, “Interesting. I thought those were cherubs.”

“I do believe that’s the first time a Malfoy has ever been called angelic.” Draco smirked.

Theo hummed. “I don’t know. Hermione, correct me if I’ve got my Muggle lore wrong, but Lucifer was a fallen angel, was he not?”

She bit her lip, barely stifling her laughter as Draco’s mouth fell open in offense. The false kind, apparently, as his lips twitched even as his eyes narrowed. “I’m going to get you for that.”

Theo waggled his brows in an apparent dare, but before he could further tease, she cleared her throat. “Not to interrupt, but I really shouldn’t leave your mother waiting.”

“Theo’s mother?” Draco smoothed his hand down his front before presenting his arm. “I’ll show you to the tea room.”

Theo collapsed atop an ornate, baroque style chaise and heaved a sigh. “I’ll be waiting for my punishment, Draco.”

Draco shot Theo a heated look over his shoulder as he guided her through the doorway and into a rather impressive looking foyer. This must’ve been what Draco meant by open concept and—

Her heart lurched and she squeezed Draco’s elbow tighter. Nothing looked the same, but no doubt somewhere in the space was the place Bellatrix had had her fun, with wand and knife. It had to
have been her imagination, but part of her swore she could still hear her laughter, her cackling as
she carved into Hermione’s skin with sadistic glee.

Draco’s footsteps faltered as her grip became strangling. “Are you all right?”

She shook her head and opened her mouth, but nothing came out besides several gasping breaths as
phantom pain lanced through her. Perspiration broke out along her neck and upper lip as her
stomach rolled and her already damp palms went wet. It was so easy to imagine it was sticky hot
blood dripping down her forearm and not sweat.

“Hey, hey.” He was in front of her suddenly, gripping her shoulders as he crouched to meet her
height. Silver eyes full of worry stared into hers. “Breathe for me, Hermione. It’s okay, you’re
safe.”

Right. Yes. She was safe. Of course she was. Bellatrix was dead, the pain wasn’t real, and her
wound was a scar, not fresh. It was silly to let something like a physical location have power over
her when she’d returned to plenty of places that held terrible memories. Gods, Hogwarts had seen
more than its fair share of death and she’d returned by choice, bravely traipsing over once blood-
soaked stones in the Great Hall and the library and the entrance and the astronomy tower and the
grounds and—and—.

“I’m okay,” she whispered.

“You are, I swear.” Draco nodded, hands migrating from her shoulders to cradle her face. “Nothing
bad is going to happen to you here, you understand. I’d sooner die than let something happen to
you.”

That was—no. An image of Draco lying broken on the stone floor of Hogwarts, his fair hair
crusted red with blood and his gray eyes dull and lifeless flashed before her eyes. Her lips trembled
and her vision swam as she reached out, clutching his shirt, his arms, everywhere she could reach.

How easily that could’ve happened, or something as comparably awful, and she wouldn’t have
known this, known any of this. The feel of Draco’s arms around her, his warmth, the sight of his
smile, the real kind. She wouldn’t have gotten the chance to love him and him her and that was too
awful to put into words.

“Shhh,” Draco soothed, folding her into his arms and stroking her back gently. Warmth from his
palm suffused through her robes, a comfort she’d never take for granted. “You’re okay,
Hermione.”

She swallowed over the thick lump in her throat and sniffed hard, banishing her tears through sheer
force of will. “I’m fine,” she croaked.

Draco’s hand cupped the back of her neck beneath her mass of hair, his long fingers cool against
her heated skin. “I shouldn’t have asked you to come.”

She shook her head. “No. I’m okay. I only need a moment.”

Pressing her nose into his chest, she inhaled his scent and held it before doing it again, breathing in
deep lungful after lungful until her chest loosened.

The soft clack of footsteps against the marble floor sounded from far across the room. “Draco
dear?”

Gods, Narcissa. How late was to tea was she? Talk about a terrible impression.
Draco hugged her tighter, making it impossible for her to wiggle from his hold or peek around his arm. “Just a moment, Mother. We’ll be along shortly.”

The sound of her retreat was as quiet as her arrival.

“I really am okay,” she assured him, fingers pressing gently against his sides. “I just didn’t expect it to hit me like that.”

He released his grip, but held her near, staring down at her, concern etched into his face. “Take your time. Mother will understand.”

Hopefully he was right.

She bit the inside of her cheek and lifted her chin, bracing herself. “Was it…here?”

She gestured to the floor beneath them.

“No.” Draco shook his head. Keeping one hand on her hip, he pivoted and pointed beyond the grand staircase. “That drawing room was just behind the stairs. We don’t need to go near there.”

The space was nondescript, just another point in this magnificent, huge room. Nothing about it screamed torture. The candelabra that had gone fuzzy above her as she had cried and panted was gone, a smooth swath of ceiling in its place, and the rug her blood and sweat and tears and piss had seeped into was replaced with continuous marble, just like the rest of the floor. It was just space, square footage, nothing special. She nodded. “Okay.”

Draco was watching her closely, carefully, as if at any moment she’d be liable to collapse or hyperventilate herself into a second panic attack. She wasn’t going to say she was fine and dandy, by no means, but she meant it that she was all right. Maybe it took seeing the space for her to exorcise herself of the fear, something akin to facing down a boggart and watching it turn into something fantastical. Now she was—well, not great by any means, but she was okay.

Swiping a hand above her mouth and then across her sweaty brow, she sighed. “I probably look a mess, don’t I?”

He tucked a curl behind her ear and shook his head. “You look beautiful.”

She snorted. “You’re just saying that.”

Draco arched a brow, lips curling. “Fine. Your curls are impossible, you missed a spot of soot behind your ear, and you’re giving that Muggle Christmas deer a run for its money with how red your nose is.”

“Thanks.” She rolled her eyes, laughing.

“But”—Draco grasped her chin gently between his thumb and forefinger and tilted her face up—“you’re still the most beautiful woman I’ve ever set my eyes on.”

Her face flamed. “Thank you, but I don’t need you to flatter me, Draco.”

“I’m not,” he said, still holding her chin. “You are. And not only because of the way you look, but”—he paused, his cheeks pinking—“because of who you are. Strictly between you and me, I find your courage compelling.”

Her lips twitched. “You find my bravery attractive?”
He hummed. “I’ll deny it if you tell anyone, but yes. And your altruism and your loyalty and perseverance. Honestly, had it not been for your unwavering Gryffindor tendencies, you might never have forgiven me, let alone given me a chance. So yes, I have a soft spot for your particular brand of madness. Just yours, though. You won’t catch me wearing red and gold in this lifetime.”

She turned her head and pressed a kiss to his palm. “What if I ask nicely?”

Draco cut his eyes. “How nicely?”

Kissing his palm again, this time she let her lips linger. “Very nicely.”

“Tease,” Draco chided.

She shook her head. “I can’t keep your mother waiting. Show me where I need to be and then go see Theo.”

“What if I ask nicely?” he asked. “After tea?”

“Are you staying?”

She shook her head. “I can’t keep your mother waiting. Show me where I need to be and then go see Theo.”

“Am I?” She bit her lip and peered up at him through her lashes.

Draco grinned. “You sincerely believe she doesn’t think we’re shagging?”

“I…” Oh, perfect. Just what she wanted to worry about. “Ignorance is bliss, Draco.”

“For her, or you?”

She shook her head. “I can’t keep your mother waiting. Show me where I need to be and then go see Theo.”

If possible, his grin grew. “So that’s a yes? You’ll be staying.”

“We’ll see.” She sniffed.

Draco shook his head and gestured toward the other end of the foyer. She took his arm once more and allowed him to lead the way across the marble floor and past the staircase through another doorway into another spacious room, this one full of natural light that poured in through a wall of floor to ceiling windows.

Seated upon a rather plush looking chaise that faced the door was Narcissa. She stood upon their entry and smiled. “Miss Granger, welcome. Thank you for showing her the way, darling.”

Draco nodded and removed her hand from his arm. Holding it gently between his, he leaned in and kissed the corner of her mouth. “See you shortly.” Regrettably, he released her and nodded to his mother and her both. “Enjoy your tea.”

And then he was gone and she was alone with Narcissa Malfoy.

Turning on her heel, she once more faced Draco’s mother, her lips pressed into something she prayed resembled a smile.
Narcissa nodded at the sofa opposite her. “Miss Granger, do sit. Make yourself at home.”

Crossing the room, Hermione took a seat, sweeping her hands over the skirt of her robes to smooth the plum colored fabric. “Thank you again for inviting me, Mrs. Malfoy. Though again, I do insist you call me Hermione.”

Narcissa dipped her chin. “Of course, Hermione. And likewise I insist you call me Narcissa.”

“Gladly.” Hermione crossed her ankles and folded her hands lest she fidget.

“With the cold snap we’re having, I thought it best we have our tea indoors this time,” Narcissa said.

She nodded. “That’s fine.”

A loud crack of apparition made her jolt as a house elf wearing a long pink dress and a matching bow affixed to one floppy ear appeared beside the coffee table between them. The little elf smiled and set a tray of atop the table. “The tea Mistress requested.”

Narcissa smiled. “Thank you, Milly. Before you leave I’d like to introduce you to Hermione Granger.”

The elf’s big blue eyes rounded as she grinned. “It is Milly’s pleasure to make Miss Hermione Granger’s acquaintance. Master Draco is besotted is with Miss Hermione Granger. He tells us she is kind and pretty and Milly is pleased to agree.”

Her whole body was on fire. “Thank you, Milly. It’s a pleasure to meet you as well. I love your dress.”

Milly picked up the hem and twirled in a quick circle. “Thank you, Miss Hermione Granger.” She froze. “Milly nearly forgot. Master Draco requested Milly inform you that the elves in employee at Malfoy Manor receive wages. We is free elves who work because we please. What was it Master Draco said? Tell Miss Hermione Granger the elves here make more than the Minister himself. Yes, that was it. Milly can purchase all the dresses she likes, Miss Hermione Granger. And she does.”

She bit the inside of her cheek and nodded. “I’m happy to hear that, Milly.”

The elf nodded slowly before wincing. “Miss Hermione Granger has no need to knit us scarves and socks. We is fine without them. Happy even. Please don’t trouble yourself to knit them.”

Yes, yes, her atrocious knitwear was the stuff of legend. “No, Milly. I’ve put my knitting needles away for good, I believe.”

“Good, good. Milly prefers pretty silk anyhow.”

With a snap of her fingers, Milly was gone.

Narcissa poured two cups of tea. “Milly has quite the personality, does she not?”

She did. In fact, Milly reminded her an awful lot of Dobby. Perhaps they were a relation, or maybe more elves than she realized were headstrong. Or both, even? “Indeed she does.”

Hermione added the requisite sugar to her tea and cradled the warm cup between her hands.

Narcissa took a quick sip of her tea and set it back on its saucer, smiling gently. “So, Hermione. I’m most glad you were able to join me, though I do regret the fact that certain”—her smile
waffled—“bad memories might’ve been triggered.”

That was a…loaded comment. How was she supposed to respond?

She took a deep breath. “I won’t lie and say they weren’t. Though I must say, it was rather cathartic, seeing the place so changed.”

Narcissa smiled softly. “Yes. Long overdue as it was, I decided to finally decorate according to my taste.”

“And before? The manor wasn’t to your liking?”

Narcissa winced. “Abraxas and Celeste were rather…particular about the décor. And until Abraxas passed, he resided here in the Manor on the fourth floor.”

*Particular* about a number of things, certainly. “Well, you’ve warmed the place up.”

“As was my intention. Is it to your liking?”

“It’s certainly homier than Grimmauld Place,” she offered.

*Anywhere* was homier than Grimmauld Place seeing as they hadn’t figured out how to shut Walburga Black up for longer than an hour at a time. She carefully left that bit out.

Narcissa’s brows lifted to her hairline, her lips parting in surprise. “You’ve been to Grimmauld Place? I wasn’t aware.”

She nodded. “Sirius left it to Harry. It’s where I’m staying currently, as a matter of fact.”

“Oh.” Her pale brows knitted together. “I was under the impression you were staying with the Weasley family.”

Not quite. She pasted on a smile. “Erm, yes. She does seem rather…put out.”

“I can imagine, and dare I say, it is her loss.” She smiled softly. “While I’m sure Grimmauld has its…*charms*, you’re welcome here whenever you’d like. Consider this an open invitation.”

Narcissa paused, lips flattening briefly. “It is not my wish to overstep, but Draco has made me
aware of the precarious situation you’ve found yourself in with regard to your parents and their unfortunate inability to comprehend the struggles you’ve been through over the past several years. Nothing can replace a parent’s affection, but I do hope you can find comfort here, and perhaps even a home, if you’d like. I know Theodore has and like him, you are most welcome.”

Gods, maybe it was silly, but Narcissa’s words on top of the strain of the day, seeing the Manor for the first time in months and the talk of Molly and her parents and everything, had her eyes watering. She glanced out the window and sniffed, blinking quickly so the moisture in her eyes wouldn’t run over. “Thank you. I’m—words can’t do my appreciation justice, Narcissa.”

Narcissa waved her hand as if opening her home was nothing. “There’s plenty of room, more room than I know what to do with, quite frankly. It had been my intention, many years ago, to fill the Manor with children, but that wasn’t to be. Perhaps I’m getting my wish after all, albeit nearly two decades late.”

She could scarcely imagine she and Theo counted as filling the place. “Well, again. Thank you.”

“Of course.” Narcissa’s smile tilted, one impeccable brow arching. “Now, I’d offer you your choice of guest rooms, however, I feel that would be unnecessary?”

Merlin. “Erm, well, I wouldn’t want to impose.”

“Clever answer.” Narcissa grinned. “I’m only teasing, dear. I remember what it was like to be young and in love. I’m sure you’ll find Draco’s rooms to your liking, and if not, simply say the word and I’m certain he’d be amenable to changing whatever you wish.”

Would Narcissa notice if she cast a cooling charm on herself? Probably. No, absolutely. But Gods, she was sweating and her tea wasn’t helping. “Okay?”

Narcissa laughed. “Relax, Hermione. I have no intention of interrogating you. I only wish to get to know you better because, as Milly said, my son is besotted.”

“It’s mutual.” She smiled, bunching the fabric over her knees between her fingers.

“Oh, I am most glad to hear that,” Narcissa breathed the words as if relieved.

“Are you?” she blurted. “I mean—I’m sure I’m not what you had in mind.”

Delicately, Narcissa cleared her throat. Her crystal blue eyes dropped to her lap briefly before she met Hermione’s stare once more, this time with a steely decisiveness. “You are correct. There was a time when…well, Lucius and I had been in talks with the Greengrass family and a potential match between Draco and one of their daughters had been discussed.”

There were two Greengrass girls, one in their year and another who was younger. Pretty Purebloods, exactly as she’d expected. Her mouth filled with something bitter at the thought.

“Then Draco made us aware of his relationship with Theodore and the war was upon us and in what seemed to be a matter of no time at all, everything was upended and so much hung in the balance. Not to mention, along the way I realized the depth of my son’s affections for you. My desire for Draco to marry well swiftly morphed into a desire for him to be happy,” Narcissa explained. “And that continues to be my greatest wish. If the war taught me anything—and I do feel it taught me a great many lessons—it is that happiness must be seized and held fast with both hands. My son has found his happiness with you, you and Theodore both, and that in turn is everything I could wish for and more.”
“And the fact that I’m Muggleborn?”

“Hermione, dear, I have met Pureblood witches and wizards who lack the sense to tell a Bezoar from a Baneberry, let alone the wit to tell you what each is used for.” Narcissa sighed. “I won’t do you the disrespect of lying and saying that, at one point in our youth, Lucius and I weren’t keen to follow the Dark—Voldemort.” Narcissa paled at her utterance of the name. “But that time was brief and we were misguided by a desire for old comforts and stability, and we were terribly foolish. However, once a follower, always a follower, until death.”

“Or defection,” she offered gently, a reminder to Narcissa that she’d hadn’t forgotten the woman’s role in helping the Order win.

Narcissa pursed her lips. “Or that. So yes, I won’t lie and say there wasn’t a time when Lucius and I would’ve been deeply aggrieved by Draco’s affections, a time when we would’ve believed them misplaced. However, that time has passed, and even then I like to think I would’ve been swayed upon seeing Draco in love. All I am now is thankful that Draco is happy and grateful to you for bringing him happiness, and I’m certain Lucius feels the same.”

It took everything she had not to laugh when Narcissa said that with a straight face. “Does he—does he know? About me?”

Draco hadn’t been to visit his father, hadn’t spoken to him, so he’d said. But Narcissa…

She nodded. “Oh, yes. Lucius is very much looking forward to meeting with you, if you’re agreeable. Once he’s home, of course.”

Of course. Merlin, what could Lucius possibly have to say to her?

“We don’t speak of it often as it’s a rather painful topic for us both, but I know Lucius always wanted a daughter.” Narcissa waved her hand. “Enough of that. This tea was meant to be pleasant and I worry we’ve done nothing but hash out the most austere of topics.”

Better to discuss them now than let them fester, but she didn’t say that. “What did you want to discuss, then?”

Narcissa’s laughter was light, twinkling. “You, of course. I feel I somehow know you both very well and very little as Draco has told me much about you, Theo has as well, but you and I have scarcely spoken.”

She wet her lips. “What would you like to know?”

“What are your plans post Hogwarts?” Narcissa asked.

The million galleon question. “It had been my plan to work for the Ministry, however I find myself rather disenchanted with the prospect of a career in politics these days. Even a career government adjacent.”

“I can imagine.” Narcissa poured them both fresh cups of tea. “So an outside agency, perhaps? Or a mastery?”

“Maybe.” She nodded.

“Not knowing is fine.” Narcissa smiled.

Hermione chuckled ruefully. “Not knowing is terrifying.”
“I do hope it’s not too bold of me to ask, but do you truly not know, or is it perhaps that you do know what you want, but you’re frightened to pursue it?” Narcissa winced. “A terrible question to pose a Gryffindor, I’m sure. I mean no offense.”

“No, you’re fine.” She shook her head. “And it’s a bit of both, I’d wager. I’d like to make a difference, in some capacity, but I’m not sure how I’d best be suited to do so. Everything I can think of either seems too low an aim or much too high.”

Narcissa nodded and stirred her tea. “You have time.”

“Enough about me,” she deflected. The topic was making her itch. “Erm, what do you enjoy… doing?”

Graceful as she was, Narcissa smiled through Hermione’s blunder of a transition. “I spend much of my time on charity work, actually. As depressing as it is, money does make the world go round and if there’s nothing else I can offer it is my pocketbook.”

“So I’ve heard. About money making the world go round, I mean.” She shifted on her cushion, relaxing into the seat. “What charities do you help with, if I might ask?”

“Of course.” She nodded. “I was previously on the board for the charity associated with the dragon sanctuary I believe one of the elder Weasley boys works with, though I stepped aside to help with the reconstruction efforts here. Specifically with the establishment of an orphanage for those who lost their parents in the war. Andromeda, my sister as I’m sure you know, has been helping me spearhead it, quite honestly.”

“That sounds amazing,” she said. “Tragic, I mean, but wonderful that you’re working on that.”

“An uphill battle, I’m afraid,” Narcissa demurred. “Funding the orphanage is simple, it’s everything else we’re finding difficult. Procuring reliable staff has proved most tricky, especially since it has been our aim to establish a joint primary school, the first of its kind.”

“Staff, as in teachers?”

Narcissa nodded. “Yes. And don’t even get me started on putting together a curriculum. The Ministry has proven no help as there is no precedent for a school of that sort. It seems they’d rather keep their hands out of it and that would mean the school would be private and the orphanage public so all funds for the school and staff salaries would need to be funded separately from the war reconstruction and—oh, I apologize, I’m rambling.”

“No.” Hermione shook her head. “A magical primary school, Merlin, the possibilities are endless.”

They were. Gods, and if the school admitted Muggleborns? So much good could be accomplished by integrating students into the Magical world at a younger age. Students wouldn’t have to play catch-up at eleven, could instead be taught in a welcoming environment that valued knowledge, not secrecy at the expense of comprehension. A cross-cultural studies class alone could vastly improve Muggleborn-Pureblood relations, not to mention that no one would have to stumble their way through basic etiquette like she had. And those raised with magic could receive a comprehensive education as well, indispensable seeing as some of her peers’ understanding of math stopped at the most rudimentary arithmetic. No wonder so few students pursued N.E.W.T level Arithmancy and Potions.

A small smile played at the edges of Narcissa’s mouth. “Indeed they are. Perhaps, if you’re interested, you and I can discuss the venture in greater detail at a later date? Another tea, perhaps?”
“Please, I’d love to.” She nodded. “But do go on. You were saying?”

“Outside of that, I enjoy gardening, both recreationally and to fill the stock of several apothecaries, donated, of course. And decorating, obviously. I will admit, however, that I miss child rearing.” Narcissa tilted her head. “I’m sure it’s not on your agenda any time soon, but do you desire children?”

Really, a cooling charm *would* come in handy right about now. “One day, I think, yes.”

Narcissa smiled down at her teacup and nodded before lifting her eyes and pinning Hermione with a stare. “May I be frank, Hermione? I feel a need to speak with you witch to witch.”

She sat up straighter, her spine stiffening. “Yes? I mean, by all means.”

Gods, if this wasn’t already a frank conversation, what was?

“Draco and Theo are both the heirs to their houses and that carries with it a certain weight, compounded when you also consider Draco is the heir to the Black bloodline, technically,” Narcissa said. “Expectations will be placed on you by society, expectations to further those bloodlines.”

It wasn’t as if she didn’t know that, what with the discussions she had had with Draco and Theo. Maybe it hadn’t been said in the strictest of terms, but hypothetically? It was clear. Hearing Narcissa state it so boldly was something else entirely. “Right.”

“Lest you misunderstand, I have no desire to place further pressure upon you in this regard.” Narcissa set her tea aside and slid closer to the edge of her seat cushion, her hands clasped tightly in her lap, fingers interlaced. “I know what it is to feel the oppression of such expectations and the subsequent crushing weight of disappointment when you cannot deliver, for whatever reason whether it be because you might choose not to or because your body simply won’t comply.” Narcissa sniffed delicately. “I mean it, quite wholeheartedly when I say that Draco’s happiness means everything to me and I know much of his happiness hinges upon yours. Never will you be made to feel like a broodmare in this household, Hermione. Your choices are yours and yours alone in that regard.”

Gods, she had to bite the inside of her cheek to keep from tearing up. “Thank you, Narcissa. I mean, I do think I’d like children one day, to be clear, but I appreciate you saying that.”

“And I would so love to be grandmother,” Narcissa confessed, smiling. “Sooner, later, whenever you see fit. Though”—Narcissa’s smile went sly—“I wouldn’t be opposed to sooner, mind you.”

“I mean, that’s assuming, well—plenty would have to play out first.”

“Of course you’re right. No need to put the cart before the thestral.”

“Indeed.”

Seemingly lost in thought, Narcissa twirled her wedding ring around her finger idly. After a moment she shook her head. “Not to presume otherwise, but do you know much of magical bonds?”

“A bit,” she said carefully. “It’s not an area I’d claim expertise, but I know of a number of different bonds. Unbreakable vows, binding contracts, blood pacts, marriage bonds, familial bonds, debtor’s vows, elfin bonds, so on and so forth.”
Narcissa pressed her lips together. “A bit. I’d wager you know more than you claim.”

“Perhaps,” she granted. “Is it presumptuous of me to think you didn’t bring this topic up to discuss blood pacts and debtor’s vows?”

“Not at all. Rather astute of you, actually,” Narcissa said. “What do you know of marriage bonds?”

“Not much,” she said. “At least not more than Draco and Theo told me.”

Narcissa arched a brow. “You’ve discussed marriage bonds?”

She flushed. “Only loosely and theoretically. I must admit this is one area where my knowledge truly falls short.”

“I have trouble believing that,” Narcissa said. “What do you know of them?”

She hadn’t discussed this with Draco and Theo in quite some time, and for all she’d scoured the library, she’d found little on the topic. “Divorce is rare, and rather complicated, but not impossible. Infidelity is frowned upon because a marriage bond involves intertwining your magic with the other party or parties and to step outside that bond effectively weakens your magic over time. Erm, I’m afraid that’s about it.”

Narcissa nodded. “Your understanding is quite up to snuff, I assure you. Though, much like wands, there’s a special magic to marriage bonds I’m afraid too many witches and wizards, even those raised with magic, don’t quite grasp.”

She waited with baited breath.

“It’s well understood that wands choose the witch or wizard, yes?” Narcissa asked, to which she nodded. “And though we don’t quite understand the intricacies of wand allegiance, we do know that any wizard worth his salt can channel his magic through any wand. The best results, however, come from the strongest affinity between the two. You can possess a wand and use it, but for the wand to truly be yours, it must choose you.”

Yes, Mr. Ollivander had explained that. She nodded.

“Much like wands, wizards and witches can establish marriage bonds regardless of compatibility, however the strength of the bond is dictated by the affinity or compatibility between parties. And while marriages aren’t conduits for magic like wands, magic can most certainly be strengthened, multiplied even when bonds are strong,” Narcissa said. “Suffice it to say, when compatibility is weak, the magic of all parties can suffer. As is the unfortunate case of those fooled by love potions.”

“And when the compatibility is there, you just feel it?”

Narcissa nodded. “Much like when your wand chose you, you felt a certain spark, did you not? A rightness? The hum of magic zipping through your veins while at the same time tethering you to the earth beneath your feet?”

She nodded. “Another reason courtships are taken so seriously and so quickly lead to engagements?”

“Indeed.” Narcissa smiled, pleased. “If it’s there, it’s there and there’s no mistaking it.”

Like Theo had mentioned, there was that gentle tug beneath her breastbone and just below her belly
button. She could feel it best when they were close, she it was there even when they were apart, and it was strongest when they were all together. “A…tug? Like a thread?”

Narcissa lifted a hand to her chest. Her blue eyes looked close to spilling over. “Words cannot adequately express how much I look forward to having you as a daughter, Hermione. I will be quite proud to have you join our family.”

Before she could respond, let alone do Narcissa’s heartfelt comment justice, the woman nodded briskly. “The last thing I wish to do is make you uncomfortable. I would never hear the end of it from Draco if I ran you off, even briefly. A better question to pose might be if you’d like to join us for dinner this evening? Time has gotten away from me, I’m afraid. I’m sure you must be hungry.”

Matter of fact, her stomach rumbled. “I’d love to.”

And she meant it.
A/N: Hi, everyone! I hope you all had a lovely holiday or at least a few relaxing days. I got a bunch of writing in (17k words!!!) and baked some adorable Harry Potter gingerbread people, much to the confusion of my older relatives. Harry turned out the cutest, but Draco was pretty darn adorable, too :)

Anywho, I had a blast writing this chapter, so I hope you enjoy it as much as I enjoyed putting it together.

To wrap this note up, I'm so sorry I haven't yet replied to recent comments! I will reply because I love hearing from you all and I can't stress enough how much value your thoughts, but I wanted to get this chapter out and it was either reply or clean up the chapter/post. So I went with posting, but I will be replying. Promise!

Happy reading!

Draco and Theo stood outside of what was presumably the dining room, talking quietly, their faces close. Draco caught sight of them first and grinned. “Decided to stay after all, Granger?”

“Your mother was so kind to offer,” she said.

His smile crooked to the side. “As if I didn’t ask nicely? Very nicely.”

She shook her head, trying in vain not to flush.

Theo stepped forward, offering Narcissa his arm. “May I have the supreme honor of escorting you into the dining room, Narcissa?”

Narcissa rolled her eyes, a smile playing at the edges of her lips as she slipped her hand inside the crook of Theo’s elbow. “You may, Theodore.”

Draco offered her his arm and dropped his voice. “Good chat?”

“Wonderful, actually,” she said, taking his arm and allowing him to lead the way into the dining room. Like the rest of the house, at least what she’d seen, the dining room was decked out in shades of cream and gold, the table an impressively carved wooden masterpiece that commanded the focus of the room. “Your mother is very welcoming.”

“I’m glad to hear it.” Draco smiled warmly.

His smile, bright as it was, couldn’t quite distract her from the massive bruise marring the side of his throat, just below his jaw. Apparently he and Theo had been busy. Stifling her laughter with her hand, she leaned in and said, “You are aware you have a hickey the size of Scotland on your neck, right?”

He turned the most adorable shade of pink as he reached for his neck. “Whoops.”
At the head of table, Theo smiled at them, watching their interaction as he pushed Narcissa’s chair toward the table. Catching her eye, he winked, his grin widening as she flushed.

Just as Theo had done for Narcissa, Draco withdrew her chair and gestured for her to sit. After sliding her chair forward, he rounded the table and took a seat beside Theo. In tandem, Draco and Theo slid their napkins from the table and with matching flourishes, set them in their laps. She bit her lip to keep from laughing.

A crack of apparition filled the room as Milly appeared by Narcissa’s side. “Mistress would like wine this evening?”

Narcissa looked to Hermione. “Wine, Hermione?”

“That would be lovely, thank you.” She paused. “As long as it’s not fairy wine, in which case I’ll pass.”

Theo chuckled under his breath.

“Strictly regular wine, I promise. Do you have a preference for red or white?”

Not particularly. Her experience with wine didn’t go beyond the glass her parents had let her have on birthdays and Christmases, and they weren’t big drinkers so she’d never cultivated a knowledge of the stuff beyond rudimentary basics. Even now that she was of age, when she did sporadically imbibe it was usually butterbeer or small pours of firewhisky nursed over the course of an evening. “Red, I suppose? If it fits the meal, I mean.”

Narcissa nodded and turned to Milly. “A bottle of the Domaine Faiveley Pinot Noir, if you would, Milly.”

“Very good, Mistress.” The House Elf nodded and disapparated with another crack.

Theo whistled. “Wasn’t Lucius saving that case for a special occasion?”

“He was.” Narcissa smirked. “I’ll be sure to let him know we enjoyed it.”

At the mention of his father, Draco glared briefly down at his plate. As if catching himself, he smoothed his expression into a mask of neutrality, boxing his feelings away. The table was too wide for her to tap his foot with hers, but she smiled at him softly, aiming to communicate as much as care and affection—but no pity, certainly not—as humanly possible through her eyes. Draco dipped his chin, lips turning upward.

Milly appeared, bottle in hand, and began filling their glasses. As she filled Theo’s glass, he turned to the elf and grinned, dimples flashing. “You’re looking lovely this evening, Milly. I must say, your dress is splendid.”

Milly giggled and gave a small curtsey. “Milly thanks Mister Theo for the compliment.”

“Pip must be beside himself,” Theo teased.

Milly stomped her foot and set the bottle down on the table. Draco’s glass remained untouched as she crossed her arms over her boney chest and grumbled, “Pip is mean elf. He sleeps on couch after insulting his Milly so.”
What in the world? She turned to Draco, brows arched in question. He seemed to be struggling to contain himself, his mouth pressed tightly shut, his lips turning white from the pressure.

Theo clucked softly. “What did Pip do to wind up in the dog house this time?”

Milly dropped her arms, setting her hands on her knobby hips. “Pip tells Milly her dress makes her hips look big and that pink isn’t her color so Milly tells Pip that maybe Pip isn’t her color. Pip brings Milly flowers but Milly doesn’t want those. Milly wants dresses and Pip has no taste. Still thinks pillow cases and tea towels are fashion. Bah!”

Merlin. Though she be but little, she is fierce, indeed. Like Draco, she had to bite her lip to keep from laughing at the elf’s domestic tirade.

Theo shook his head in sympathy and bent his head, vanishing the distance between him and Milly until he was almost nose to nose with the elf. “You know what would really show Pip? If you and I ran away together. Milan is lovely this time of year. I could buy you all the dresses your heart desires.”

Milly blushed a vibrant shade of fuchsia and slapped Theo’s arm lightly. “Handsome Mister Theo teases Milly so, but Milly knows Mister Theo loves Master Draco.” Milly grinned slyly, batting her lashes. “And Miss Hermione Granger.”

Hermione’s breath caught, pulse thundering in her ears. Theo turned a shade of red to rival Milly’s blush and brought his hand to his chest. “You’re breaking my heart, Milly. If you don’t want me, have the decency to tell me it straight.”

The elf cocked her head to the side, blue eyes sparkling with humor. “Milly knows her feminine wiles are beguiling, but Miss Hermione Granger is a most formidable witch, Milly knows. If Milly stole her wizard, Miss Hermione Granger would make Milly wear”—the elf grimaced—“knitted goods. Mister Theo is most handsome, but he is not worth wearing wool, not even the finest merino wool, Milly is afraid. Perhaps cashmere, but Milly would need to think on it.”

She slapped a hand over her mouth to muffle her shocked laughter.

“And what am I?” Draco asked, chuckling. “Chopped liver, Milly?”

Milly tutted softly. “Master Draco is a dashing young wizard, yes, but Milly once changed his nappies. Some things Milly simply cannot forget.”

And with that, Milly snapped her fingers, leaving the room.

Laughing, Theo shook his head and passed Draco the bottle of wine so he could pour himself a glass. Draco took the bottle, shooting Theo a mock glare, and said, “I think Milly likes you better than me.”

Narcissa laughed, swirling her wine by the delicate stem of her glass. “Oh, darling, Milly adores you. You were a delightful baby, but you did pull on her poor ears like they were toys.”

“Wait,” Hermione said. “I’m sorry, who exactly is Pip?”

“Milly’s husband.” Narcissa smiled. “She and Pip have been together nearly as long as Lucius and me. Pip was one of his personal elves, and Milly mine, and they met when we were first betrothed. They have their tiffs, quite clearly, but Milly loves Pip dearly.”

“Despite his deplorable fashion sense,” Theo said.
“I see.” Hermione laughed. “And she has quite the crush on you.”

Theo smirked. “What can I say, I’m a—what did Milly say? Handsome wizard?”

“Only because she never changed your nappies,” Draco said.

“I bet she’d like me even if she had,” Theo wagered. “I bet she’d really like me, actually.”

Narcissa took a sip of wine and set her glass aside. “I’m afraid, Hermione, it seems that you have your hands quite full with these two.”

Theo waggled his brows.

And of course Narcissa noticed. “Theodore, what did I say about innuendos at the dinner table?”

“Make them good or don’t make them at all?” Theo bit his lower lip and smiled angelically.

Hermione hid her smile in a sip of wine.

“And might I add,” Theo said. “You teed that up for me, Narcissa. In all honesty, it was your innuendo and I merely brought it to everyone’s attention.”

With a point throat clearing, Narcissa ignored Theo entirely. “Hermione, did I mention I have several photo albums of Draco’s infancy?”

She shook her head. “You didn’t, no.”

“Well, I do. Perhaps after dinner you’d be interested in having a look see?”

Draco preened, brows arching and lips pulling to the side as he sat up straighter against his chair. “I was adorable.”

“Yeah, when you were pulling poor Milly’s ears and who knows what else,” Theo teased. “She was clearly traumatized by your nappy changes.”

“As a matter of fact”—Narcissa smirked—“I do believe I have several photos of you, as well, Theodore. Photos from your playdates here at the Manor.”

Oh, Gods. This was too good to pass up. “Magical photos?”

Narcissa hummed. “Mhmm. I believe Milly’s soft spot for Theodore originated when he allowed her to dress him up in crinoline and tulle.”


Narcissa arched a brow. “Language.” She took a sip of her wine and when she set it down, smirked. “And oh, yes.”

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“Draco, your hair!”

Narcissa and Theo cackled gleefully as Draco turned red and scrambled over the table to grab the photo. Hermione yanked it out of his reach and hurled the photo to Theo before Draco could swipe it.
Draco huffed. “Yes, yes, I had curls. Curls that straightened before I lost my first tooth, mind you.”

“Curls.” Her stomach burned and her face was damp with tears as she covered her mouth and laughed.

“Charming curls, Granger,” he said, sniffing and he crossed his arms. “I was adorable.”

“Oh, you were the sweetest, darling.” Narcissa sighed and dabbed at the corners of her eyes. “My precious baby boy, and now you’re all grown up.” She sniffled and quickly fanned her face with her hand. “Merlin, look at me. I’m a mess. This wine has gone straight to my head, I’m afraid. Perhaps it’s best I retire for the evening.”

She wasn’t the only one feeling a little fuzzy from the wine. Hermione had had two glasses—or was it three?—but the stuff was far more potent than she’d anticipated and the glasses had been generous. Goblets, honestly. Warm from her nose down to her toes, she finished the swill at the bottom of her glass, licked the rim, and pushed it aside.

Theo and Draco both stood as Narcissa rose gracefully from her chair despite the wine she’d imbibed. She didn’t even wobble in her pumps, not a bit, as she rounded the table, pressing kisses to both their cheeks, spending an extra moment patting Draco’s face and smoothing back his hair. She leaned in and whispered something in his ear that made him smile, before he pulled her in for a hug. “‘Night, Mother.”

Narcissa stopped beside Hermione’s chair and rested a hand on her shoulder. “Good night, Hermione dear. I imagine I’ll see you at breakfast?”

“Well. Definitely.” She loved breakfast. And if it tasted anything like dinner? Mm yes, sign her up.

Narcissa smiled and pinched one of her curls between her elegant fingers before watching it spring back into place. She sighed longingly. “Oh, you have such lovely curls, too.” She dropped her hand and shook her head. “Goodness gracious, I really need to get to bed. Sleep well, everyone.”

As soon as Narcissa was out of the room, Draco and Theo lost it, peals of laughter filling the dining room. Draco covered his mouth and shook his head. “What exactly did my mother and you discuss, Hermione? She’s in a right state this evening.”

“Nursery décor?” Theo teased as he refilled her glass of wine before she could stop him.

She scoffed, fanning her face. “No. Don’t be silly.”

Draco’s eyes crinkled at the corners. “Come on, Hermione. Share with the class.”

“We discussed her charity work, okay?” Her fingers brushed her nose and—Gods, was her nose always so numb at the tip. She poked it lightly for good measure. Yup, she was tipsy all right. “And she told me I was welcome here whenever I’d like.”

“And?” Theo prodded.

“And we maybe also discussed the future.”

“The future?” Draco hummed. “So why is it my mother’s reminiscing about my infancy?”

“She might’ve asked me my feelings on children,” she granted.

Theo arched a brow. “And you said?”
She took a long drink and shrugged. Oh, that wine was good. Too good. “That I’d like them. One day.”

Draco beamed. Merlin, his teeth were white and his lips were so unfairly full and pink and his chin—Gods, how had she ever thought it was too pointy? He was so handsome it made her ache. And Theo, oh, Theo. She turned and he was smiling too, a more subdued smile that still brought out the adorable dimples in his cheeks and made the edges of his sapphire eyes crinkle. She sighed. “You’re both so pretty you make my eyes hurt.” She blinked twice. “Oh. I think I might be drunk.”

Theo reached across the table and dragged her half-empty glass toward him by the tips of his fingers until it was out of her reach. “Yes, I do believe you are.”

One second Draco was on the other side of the table and then suddenly he was beside her, helping her stand. Had he apparated over, or had she blinked the longest blink in the history of blinks? Huh. “Come on, it’s time to get you to bed.”

Pretty and he smelled nice. Like sugar and Theo was spice and together they were everything nice. So nice. She leaned in, resting her hands on his stomach. Gods, he was rock hard. Hard. She snorted and trailed her fingers down to his belt. “You and Theo are taking me to bed? Lucky me.”

“To sleep.” Draco captured her wandering fingers and brought them to his mouth, gently kissing her fingertips. His breath was warm as it fanned the webbing of her fingers. She shivered. “You’re drunk, remember?”

Well, yes. Solid deduction, Sherlock. Twenty point to Slytherin. “I thought you wanted to shag in me your bathtub.”

Draco bit the edge of his lip. “Right now, you’re liable to drown if I tried.”

Drowning would be a mood-killer, but a carefully placed bubblehead charm and—oh, that had possibilities. Maybe she needed to jot that down so she wouldn’t forget. “Theo, can you get me some parchment?”

He was behind her, his hands resting on her hips. His breath was warm as he pressed a kiss to the back of her neck that made her hum. “What for?”

“I just got an idea for using a bubblehead charm and I don’t want to forget.”

Theo snorted and Draco shut his eyes, lips pressed tightly together like he was trying not to laugh. What was so funny about that?

Since Draco was being no help, she arched her back and pressed her bum into Theo’s crotch. His breath caught loudly, making her grin. Hello, there. “Mmm, Draco, what was it you said? Something about I’ll know when you two gang up on me?”

Right now she was sandwiched between them, so it seemed like they were off to a good start. Only there was too much clothing. And standing. And they were in the dining room. Though that impressive table had potential…

Theo’s fingers bit into her hips as he groaned. “Gods, love, if you’re trying to kill us, you’re succeeding.”

“Granger,” Draco said, shaking his head fondly. It looked fond, but then again the light was doing funny things to his hair, glinting off his strands and making him look like he was glowing. Cherubic. She bit the inside of her cheek to keep from giggling. “As much as I enjoy making you
forget your name in the throes of passion, I much prefer it when you can actually remember our
lovemaking, okay? Actually, it’s not a preference, it’s a necessity.”

“Lovemaking.” That was a pretty word. It made her tongue tingle, or maybe she was drunker than
she’d realized. Bah, she was fine. “Because I love you. And I love shagging you.”

Draco’s shoulders shook as he chuckled beneath his breath. “Gods, you are a trip, Granger. But
yes, I love you, too. Even when you’re smashed.”

Theo played with her hair, stroking his fingers through the curls at the nape of her neck. If she was
a cat, she’d be bloody purring. Huh, she had been a cat once, come to think of it.

She was getting off track. “Theo?”

He hummed. “Yes?”

“I’m drunk.” She hadn’t meant to get drunk, but the wine had been delicious and the day had been
stressful, and each glass had gone down so easily. And she trusted Draco and Theo, trusted that she
could let her hair down. Only apparently she’d pulled a Rapunzel and really let her hair down. Whoops.

“As we’ve established,” he reminded.

“No, I mean I’m drunk so I can’t say it now, not for the first time, but remind me tomorrow to tell
you I love you.”

His fingers stopped stroking her hair, only for a moment before he resumed his gentle petting.
When he spoke, his voice was quiet, nothing more than a whisper she had to strain to hear. “I can
do that.”

Good. Now that that was settled… “If you two won’t shag me, can I least watch while you shag
each other?”

It was a perfectly normal request, Merlin, but for some reason it sent them both into a fit. Draco
laughed so hard his face turned red and Theo’s chest rumbled against her back. Wiping his eyes,
Draco shook his head. “Can you keep your eyes open long enough to watch?”

Drat. “Maybe?”

“Put that away before I bite it.” Draco tapped her lower lip that was slightly jutted out.

“Is that a promise?”

He looked over her shoulder to Theo. “You want to carry her up?”

One moment her feet were on the ground and the next she was in Theo’s arms, her head resting in
the crook of his elbow and his other arm cradling her under her knees. He was smiling down at her
softly. “Hey, Gorgeous. Doing all right?”

“Perfect.” She turned her head and buried her nose in his shirt where the scent of him, cloves and
transferred remnants of Draco’s cologne, was strongest. Okay, now she was perfect. “I’m just
going to shut my eyes for a minute.”

A teeny-tiny voice in the back of her head told her she was going to be so embarrassed tomorrow,
but it also sounded an awful lot like she did in second year and she was a touch annoying back
then, so she ignored it.

With her eyes closed, she obviously couldn’t see where they were going, but she could feel the gentle jostling of Theo’s arms around her as he carried her out of the dining room, through the foyer, up the stairs, and down a long hallway.

“Hermione.”

She blinked her eyes open. They were in a bedroom, Draco’s room presumably. Unlike the cream and gold walls of the downstairs, his room was painted in a rather fetching shade of gray, pearlescent nearly, as the muted light from the chandelier overhead caused the walls to shimmer. Or maybe that was just her eyes.

Theo set her down at the foot of Draco’s impressive canopied bed. As soon her feet were on the floor, Draco took her hand and walked her to another door. “Bathroom is through here. You need help?”

“’m fine.” She shook her head and stepped inside the room, shutting the door carefully. Help, psh. She was dandy. Toasty and happy and she could pee by herself, thank you kindly.

Using the loo quickly, or as quickly as she could, she washed her hands and stared at her reflection in Draco’s mirror. Weird, she didn’t look drunk. She raised her soapy index finger to her nose and gave it another poke. Okay, yes, still very tipsy.

Drying her hands, Hermione wandered back into the bedroom. Theo was already under the covers, propped against a stack of pillows, whereas Draco was perched on the edge of the bed. He stood when she entered the room and helped her up into the bed which was—Merlin, talk about a tall piece of furniture. Even sober she’d have needed the help, otherwise she’d have had to jump to reach the mattress. Or at least begin with a running start.

“You want to sleep in one of my old Quidditch kits?” Draco offered, tugging off her shoes.

Tempting as that sounded, being wrapped up in Draco’s clothing, the room was too warm for that much fabric. “No. I’ll sleep in my knickers, I think.”

Draco nodded and helped her with the teeny tiny row of buttons on her robes. When the outer shell of cape-like fabric hung open, he tugged her sleeves down and then patted her hip so he could pull the dress down her legs and off.

Left in her underthings, Hermione crawled up the bed toward Theo who drew back the covers for her to wiggle in beside him.

“Oh! My hair.” She sat up. Shoot, she needed her wand to tie it back properly. “Draco, can you pass me my wand?”

“I’ve got it.” Theo leaned over to the nightstand and grabbed his wand. A few flourishes later and her hair was secured in a braid. He pursed his lips. “Not too shabby, I’d say.”

She ran her hand down the plait and nodded. “You’re getting good at beauty charms.”

He snorted. “I’ll leave the preening to Draco.”

Draco rolled his eyes and tugged off his shirt before wandlessly dimming the lights. He turned back to the bed and frowned. “You don’t feel like you’re going to be sick, do you?”
She shook her head. “I’m not dizzy. Just warm. And tingly.”

He passed her a glass of water from his nightstand. “Drink this for me, okay? And then you can go to sleep.”

Taking the glass from him, she chugged most of it in one go before taking a breather. Hmm, was water normally so refreshing and dare she say, minty? Maybe it was just expensive Malfoy water. She drained the rest and almost asked for more. Then again, the last thing she needed was to need to use the loo in the middle of the night. Draco set the cup back on the nightstand and then crawled under the covers, extinguishing the light with another wave of his hand.

Now that it was time to go to bed, her head nice and snug against a pillow that had no business being as soft as it was, she was wide awake. She heaved a sigh and shifted against the mattress.

“Go to sleep, Hermione.” Theo curled an arm around her waist and pulled her bum snug against his front.

“I’m not tired anymore,” she whined.

Draco chuckled. “You need a bedtime story?”

She snorted. “Would you tell me one?”

“Oh.” Draco floundered. “There once was a Gryffindor princess—”

“Stop.” She laughed. “I’m not that drunk, Draco.”

Theo hummed and kissed the lobe of her ear, making her shiver. “Why don’t you tell us more about what you and Narcissa talked about, yeah?”

That sounded like an awful idea. “No way. I am, however, too drunk for that.”

“Come on,” Draco prodded. “You aren’t chicken, are you?”

“I’m not scared.” She scoffed. “Ask me anything.”

“If you insist.” She couldn’t see in the dark, not really, but there was a quick flash in front of her face and she was pretty sure it was Draco’s teeth grinning. “You said you talked about the future?”

“Mhmm. Your mother wants to open an orphanage, you know? I think that’s nice. Commendable. And a school, she wants to start a primary school. Your mum likes kids, I think.” She laughed. “She really wants grandbabies but she told me sooner or later, she doesn’t mind. I’m not a broodmare, she said.”

Theo chest shook against her back.

Draco chuckled. “No, you’re not. But what do you think about babies?”

“I already told you.” She rolled her eyes. Merlin, didn’t they listen? “Weren’t you paying attention?”

“I mean, less hypothetically, Granger. What do you think about babies with us?” Draco asked.

Oh. She bit her lip. It was easy to imagine it, or at least the wine made it simple. Little platinum haired babies with riotous curls and her brown eyes, others with curly brown hair and Theo’s dark blue irises. Or maybe brown hair and quicksilver eyes. Something inside her melted, turning her
insides as gooey and warm as the chocolate soufflé they’d had for dessert. “We’d make cute babies.” She smacked a hand across her mouth almost instantly, her eyes rounding. “I didn’t say that.”

Oh, she was never drinking again. No sir, never again.

“Nuh uh. *In vino veritas*, Granger.” Draco’s hand reached for her in the darkness. His fingers traced her features almost reverently, as if seeing through touch. Reaching her hand, he twined their fingers together and brought their clasped hands down to the mattress between them. “You might not remember this tomorrow, but we certainly will.”

She groaned. “You’re cruel. I’m drunk, I have no filter.”

Theo’s breath ghosted against the shell of her ear. “Slytherins, love. Lest you forgot.”

“No one’s judging you,” Draco said. “We *would* make cute little sprogs.”

“Smart ones, too,” Theo mused. “*Scary* smart.”

Hermione worried her lip. If she had no intention of getting married at nineteen, what business did she have talking about children? Then again, it was becoming harder and harder to think of a long-term future with Draco and Theo as a *maybe* when everything about it felt definite, felt right, not a matter of *if* but *when*. As Narcissa had put it, being with them was like the first time she’d held her wand. Her magic sang inside her veins, in her core, both contented and full of potential, her body all but vibrating with rightness. She’d never been this happy, not even when she first got her letter to Hogwarts. Pretending otherwise was silly, no, *stupid*. And she might’ve been a great many things, drunk currently, but stupid wasn’t one of them.

So maybe she didn’t want babies now, but wasn’t this something they were supposed to talk about? Honesty and communication were vital, after all. So what if she couldn’t feel her nose?

She shook her head. “How would that even work?”

“How would what work?” Theo’s fingers traced abstract patterns above her bellybutton.

“Babies,” she said.

Draco cleared his throat. “Well, Granger, when a mummy and daddy love each other very much…”

She tried to smack his arm, but wound up hitting him in the forehead.

“Oh! Watch it! I don’t need another broken nose, thank you very much.” Draco huffed. “Violent little witch.”

Moving carefully, she patted his head gently. Merlin his hair was soft as down. “Sorry, but that’s not what I meant. I meant…what will you do? Flip a coin?”

That seemed more fair than going alphabetically.

Silence pervaded. Had they not heard her? Was she unclear? She was drunk, yes, but she was nearly positive she’d made sense and—

Theo sputtered. “Sweet Salazar, did you just suggest we flip a coin to see who gets to have the honor of getting you up the duff first?”

“It’s not a terrible idea.” Draco broke down, laughing so hard she could feel each warm exhalation
against her face. “Okay, sorry, I can’t say that with a straight face.”

She groaned, burying her face in the pillow.

Theo snorted. “Ah yes, our special let’s knock Hermione up galleon. We can frame it when we’re through. Just so we’re clear, I call tails, Draco. I can’t imagine you’ll have much success with heads.”

“Stop it.” Thank goodness it was dark otherwise her flush would’ve been brighter than a neon sign. “Keep it up and I’ll make you sleep on a couch with Pip. Milly and I will run away to Milan and we’ll be fine without you boys.”

Draco snagged her hand and kissed her palm with his warm, soft lips. Warm soft lips that should’ve been kissing hers but he was so far away. What was with them and impossibly large beds and too many pillows? “We’re just teasing, but in all honesty, I doubt a coin flip will be necessary.”

Theo nuzzled the skin behind her ear. “Totally unnecessary.”

Her brow furrowed. “Oh?”

“Oh.” Theo chuckled. “You’re so seldom confused that when you are, it’s adorable.”

“Honestly?” Draco shifted against the pillow, his hair making a soft sound against the case. “If it weren’t for the fact that bloodlines do matter, that our houses require heirs, I’d say to hell with it and biology wouldn’t even be a consideration. Theo’s children will be as much mine as his and vice versa.”

Theo’s hand slipped from her stomach. She didn’t need to see to know he’d reached for Draco. Her tummy went warm and something inside her chest squeezed pleasantly.

“Seeing as Draco’s right, and bloodlines carry an importance, he’s the heir to two houses, technically. I figure, he can go first. But he’s also correct in that I’m totally laying claim to your swotty little blond sprogs.”

Hermione smiled into the cool pillow cover. “Sounds nice.”

Draco hummed. “Getting sleepy?”

“A little.” She yawned. “Keep talking.”

“We do have time,” Draco said. “There’s no rush.”

Theo’s nose bumped against the back of her head as he nodded. “We probably should make an honest woman out of you first.”

“If that’s your idea of a proposal, it’s rather lackluster,” she teased.

“When we propose, you’ll know it,” Theo assured her.

She grinned. “Oh it’s a when now is it?”

Theo laughed. “Wasn’t it always?”

“Perhaps.” She bit back another yawn and blinked into the darkness. “What about you both? You had to have talked about it before, right? Before me? Marriage?”
Draco’s lips were on her forehead, kissing her gently. Gods, when had her eyes gotten so heavy?
“We have, yes. Always figured we’d wait until after graduating.”

“Made the most sense,” Theo agreed.

She hummed. “My birthday’s on September nineteenth. I turn twenty, you know.”

“That you do, Granger,” Draco said, sounding so far away.

“’m just saying. I won’t be nineteen anymore.”

Theo squeezed her hip. “Gods, I’m going to love showing you this memory one day.”
Chapter Twenty-One

Chapter Notes

Happy New Year, everyone! Here's to a fantastic 2019! May your year bring you health, wealth, and happiness...or whatever it is you seek :)

I hope you enjoy this chapter!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Gods, she was warm. Exceptionally warm as if she’d fallen asleep on a cloud in front of a fireplace. Except clouds and fireplaces didn’t make her wet between her thighs and she was soaked, dripping and there was something, someone, stroking her. Talk about a realistic dream. Never before had she been so close to coming in her sleep before and—“Oh.”

Her moan was embarrassingly loud, downright wanton, and it filled the air as she rocked against the fingers circling her clit. Lips brushed against the nape of her neck, warm and soft and—oh, there was tongue, just a hint of tongue brushing against her skin, tasting. She opened her mouth, but all that came out was a low, broken mewl as—her eyes snapped open. Draco was staring at her, nearly nose to nose in the dim room, heavy curtains blocking out the morning light.

Not a dream. Definitely not a dream. It was Theo touching her, had been touching her. As soon as it sunk in, her brain booting up, he hooked her leg over his and slid into her from behind, his cock hard and hot and grazing all the right spots. “Fuck.”

Draco’s sleepy, smirking stare down did little more than fan the embers of lust cresting within her. What little light filtered in through the windows silhouetted Draco’s form, and before she could even bother stringing together a greeting, he leaned in and pressed his mouth to hers. His lips, his kiss stole her focus along with her words.

All she could do was feel, feel as Theo gripped her thigh and rocked into her, cock pressing perfectly into her while Draco kissed her breathless. No, she wasn’t asleep—unless this was a dream? She’d imbibed quite a bit, but this was more than her brain, pickled or not, could’ve put imagined at—well, whatever time it was. Draco’s fingers slithered between their bodies and circled her clit, and okay, yes, there was no way this wasn’t reality. Dreams were good, but they weren’t that good, good enough to make her toes curl into the sheets and her eyes roll back, no. This was real, the sensations electric, and—oh, could she wake up like this every day?

Draco’s tongue traced the seam of her mouth, his teeth nipping at her bottom lip. “You going to come, Hermione?”

Theo grunted softly in her ear and the raw sound of masculine pleasure made her insides clench. “Yeah, she is. Her cunt’s already milking me.”

She furrowed her brow and rocked forward and back, torn between meeting Theo’s perfect thrusts and Draco’s hand, his fingers playing her beautifully, stroking her to release. So close, she just needed a little push—

Theo’s teeth grazed against the space where her neck met her shoulder and she was freefalling,
trembling in his arms and Draco’s both as her climax racked her body, her muscles twitching as prismatic lights bursts behind her lids.

Draco kissed the space between her brows, then her nose, her lips, her chin, all sweet connect-the-dot kisses that cushioned her fall back to the earth as Theo’s thrusts slowed to a stop and he pulled out of her, his cock still hard. Theo patted her hip gently. “Hands and knees, love.”

Did she even have the strength for that? Maybe she did, maybe she didn’t, but she could try and—okay, not so difficult rolling to her tummy, now all she needed to do was press up and—good, good. She was on her hands and knees, okay, hands and elbows but surely that counted?

Suddenly Theo yanked her hips back, dragging her down the bed. She gasped, scrambling for purchase against the sheets. Gods, her cunt was still fluttering with aftershocks and he was already manhandling and—"Theo."

He hadn’t even given her a moment to gather her wits, what remained of them or existed in the first place, before he’d nudged his cock back inside, so impossibly deep like he was trying to fuck her brain by way of her heart. She dropped her head, let it hang, and panted.

Theo kissed the topmost knob of her spine. “You’re good at multitasking, aren’t you, love?”

Hmm, was she? She usually preferred to give one task her all but there were certainly instances where such measures were called—

A shadow fell across the rumpled duvet. Draco knelt before her, the muscles of his thighs going taut as he balanced himself on the mattress and stroked a few tendrils of hair that had escaped from her braid away from her face. Totally starkers, his cock was right in front of her face, the perfect height to—ah, okay, yes, she could totally multitask, yes. Enthusiastically yes.

She didn’t have the hands to reach for him, so she leaned forward and stuck out her tongue, painting a wet strip up the underside of his cock. Draco hissed through his teeth and took himself in hand, holding his cock steady for her. In appreciation, she kissed his weeping head and darted her tongue into his slit. Muted musk and salt filled her mouth. Draco.

“That’s it,” Theo encouraged, splaying his hand against her lower back as he drove into her, hips smacking her bum on each thrust. The sound was of skin on skin was enough to make her dizzy, blood flooding her cheeks. “Suck him good, love. Just like that.”

Draco’s cock was heavy on her tongue, the vein on the underside of his shaft pulsing steadily as she trailed her lips up his flesh and back down, breathing through her nose and hollowing out her cheeks.

His fingers caught in her hair, spasming gently against her temple as he groaned. “Fuck.”

Without her hand in the mix, everything was a little trickier, but he was close, his cock practically dripping as she worked him over with her lips and tongue.

Gods, and so was she, so close, everything inside her drawing up tight, Theo’s thrusts hard and fast and perfect as he nudged that spot along her front wall and—shit, something deeper, a hotspot she didn’t know she had somewhere near her cervix. Fingers gripping the covers for dear life, she moaned around Draco’s cock, making him tug her hair.

“’m close,” Draco panted.

She sealed her lips tighter around his shaft and sucked, scrunching her eyes shut as Theo’s hand
reached around her body, his fingers brushing her clit. Draco swore once more, his lean hips jerking just once before his cock twitched against her soft palate and he came down her throat with a rumbling roar. She swallowed, moaning at the combination of Draco’s taste and how Theo’s fingers sped up and—she was so fucking close, just a little and—

Holy hell. Theo’s other thumb brushed against her pucker, pressing but not quite breaching and it was sensory overload, his cock and his fingers nudging her firmly over the edge into another mind-meltingly amazing orgasm that made her brain blank out for a moment.

By the time she came to, Theo had gone still, his hips jolting with the occasional aftershock of his own climax. Draco had thankfully removed his cock from her mouth so she could breathe unencumbered.

“Good morning,” Theo said, pulling out and grabbing her around the waist in a backward hug.

“Morning,” she said, catching her breath. Good morning, indeed.

Once Theo released her, Draco grabbed her under the arms and hauled her back up the bed, maneuvering her like a rag doll until she was splayed across his chest, her limbs as loose as noodles. “Sleep well?”

She hummed. “I did.” Huh, normally on the rare occasions after she’d had a drink, she slept fitfully. But she’d slept like a baby and awoke feeling—well, fucked, but also rather refreshed. “Surprisingly, I slept great.”

Theo cuddled up at her back and draped an arm over her waist, his hand resting against Draco’s bare hip. “A smidge of Sleeping Draught will do that for you.”

Wait, what? “When did I take Sleeping Draught?”

Draco winced. “I put a bit in your water last night. Not so much to help you sleep, but I’ve found it’s the best hangover prevention save for simple hydration. You don’t mind, do you?”

Had it been anyone else dosing her with potions she wouldn’t have just minded, she’d have been incensed. Seeing as it was Draco, she couldn’t seem to scrounge up even an ounce of care. Theo, too, was excused. To say she trusted them was putting it lightly. “No. You could’ve just told me, though, and I’d have taken it.”

He arched a brow. “Would you even remember if we told you?”

Would she? Let’s see, what did she remember? Dinner, wine, wine, lots of wine, baby pictures of—oh Gods, babies. She shut her eyes and groaned. “Oh no.”

Theo kissed the ball of her shoulder and laughed. “All coming back to you, eh? What memory in particular inspired that reaction?”

She shook her head. “I’m not reliving it, certainly not out loud.”

Draco hummed. “Let’s see, I’ll wager she’s thinking about oh we’d make such cute babies.”

“Oh or maybe are you going to flip a coin?” Theo chuckled against her skin.

“Stop.” She groaned all the way down to her bones. “It’s bad enough remembering it, we don’t need to rehash it. You remember, I remember, we all know. Now let’s pretend we don’t.”
Even she couldn’t be courageous all the time. The alcohol had made her inordinately bold and brave; a little self-preservation would balance it all out.

Draco traced the bridge of her nose with his finger. “Forget the best night of my life? I think the fuck not.”

She pursed her lips. “It’s embarrassing.”

“It’s sweet,” Theo argued. “You were adorable.”

“I was drunk.”

“Are you saying you didn’t mean it?” Draco asked, one blond brow arched imperiously.

Quite the opposite. She’d meant everything she’d said a little too much. “No. I did.” She bit the inside of her cheek. “That doesn’t freak you out, does it?”

Draco nosed at her hairline and pressed a kiss to her furrowed brow. “Like I said, Granger, best night of my life. And not just because you’re a riot when you’re smashed.”

Theo hummed, the vibration rumbling through her pleasantly. “And tempting to boot. Now you’ve got me fantasizing all kinds of dirty thoughts about bubble charms and their very unorthodox applications.”

The thought still had merit, even sober. “You want to try it?”

“Have I ever made you think I’d say no to being your sexual guinea pig, hmm?”

She tucked her head against Draco’s chest and pressed her bottom half into Theo, biting back a grin when he gasped, his formerly flaccid cock twitching against her rear as he exhibited just how quickly he could recover. “No.”

Toasty warm sandwiched between the two of them, and considering the double dose of orgasms she’d been dealt, not to mention the fact she had no caffeine in her system, she was close to falling back asleep. She likely would’ve succumbed to the siren call of a second slumber had it not been for Theo gently tugging on her shoulder and urging her to roll over. Which she did, albeit slowly and with Draco’s help shifting her as she blinked away her pre-sleep fog. “Hmm?”

Theo traced the outline of her mouth, his touch just firm enough not to tickle. His smile was achingly soft as he stared down at her. “You’re not drunk anymore.”

She frowned. No, no she wasn’t. “Right.”

But that mattered, why?

Theo’s smile wavered at the edges. “Do you not remember that bit?”

What bit? She remembered everything, she just had no idea what he was getting at. What did it matter that she wasn’t drunk, unless she’d said something—she froze. Stupid loose tongue, stupid delicious wine. Damn that wine for being so sweet and so tasty and misleadingly strong. Viciously strong.

Theo shook his head, his finger pressing against her mouth. “Never mind. You had a lot of wine.”

She snagged his finger and slipped it past her lips, clutching his hand just below her chin. “No. Theo, stop. Don’t do that. Yes, I had a lot of wine, but you don’t get to hold me to everything else I
said and then act like I didn’t mean this.”

Theo’s throat bobbed as he swallowed. “No one’s holding you to anything, Hermione.”

*Bollocks.* “Well, I am. I meant it, everything I said, even though I’m slightly humiliated at the way I said some of it, but seeing as so far neither of you seem to be judging me for any of my drunken confessions—”

“Of course we’re not,” Theo said. “It would be rather hypocritical of us to judge you for saying the sorts of things we think.”

She took a deep breath. Draco’s hand rested against the small of her back and from his grounding touch she gathered the strength to speak. “Then hopefully you also won’t judge me when I tell you I did mean it. I love you, Theo.”

Thank Merlin she’d taken a breath when she had, because Theo’s mouth was on hers, his fingers tipping her chin up as he kissed her like he was starving for it, for her. His tongue didn’t beg entry, it demanded it, sweeping against the ridges of her teeth and tangling with hers as he clutched her to him like she’d disappear if he let go.

“Thank fuck.” He panted against her mouth. “I was acting like it was fine, but inside I was dying, thinking you were just drunk.”

Behind her, Draco snorted. “Idiot.”

She shook her head, bruised, kiss-swollen lips curving upward. “Draco’s right. You’re an idiot.”

Theo grinned. “Maybe. But if so, I’m an idiot who’s madly in love with you, so perhaps that excuses my doltishness?”

Her heart swelled, her chest growing tight. “I could let it slide. Just this once.”


“Honestly, though,” she said. “How could you possibly think I didn’t?”

Theo’s shrug jostled her lightly. “Gods forbid I assume, love.”

“Sure.” She snorted. “Says the man who knew my feelings *nearly* before I did. Before I was willing to admit them to myself, at least. You’re more astute than you give yourself credit.”


“He might believe he knows the truth”—Draco ran his finger down the length of her spine, neck all the way down to the tip of her tailbone—“But he’s not going to play his hand until he’s damn well sure.”

“So you’re telling me I was that transparent? Months ago?” she asked.

Theo grinned. “See-through.”

“And I wasn’t now? You’re going to give me a complex, you know, thinking I’m more obvious in my displays of sexual attraction than my displays of affection. Have I been leaving you wanting?”

Draco chuckled.
“I’m always wanting, love, but that’s not a reflection on you, trust me.” Theo sighed. “I…hoped, but let’s just say, the stakes were higher in this.”

Fair enough. There was more to lose now than there had been back in December, but what Theo needed to realize was there’d be no loss, not in this, not with her. “Did you think you were going to scare me off? Has that happened yet? I think not. Gryffindor, lest you forgot.”

Theo laughed. “Oh ho ho, kitten has claws, hmm?”

She sank her fingers into his flank, just hard enough to make him hiss. “A gentle reminder. In case you decide to question the veracity of my feelings in the future, seeing as I’m quite sure actions speak louder than words and you know it.”

“What did Milly call her?” Draco asked. “A most formidable witch?”

“Formidable fingernails.” Theo laughed. “Merlin, woman, I get it. You’re a ferocious lion who’s not to be trifled with.”

“A ferocious lion who…what?” She lifted her brows, waiting for him to fill in the blanks.

“A ferocious lion who’s going to have all her courage tested by getting her bum spanked if she doesn’t remove her nails from my spleen.” Theo smirked.

_Flaming Flobberworms_, that was—knicker melting. Had she been wearing them, that was. “No, a formidable witch who’s going to be cross if you doubt my feelings for you.” Though… “But I won’t say no to hearing more about your suggestion.”

Theo hummed, lips quirking. “Oh? Someone wants their arse reddened, hmm?”

She’d learned enough of her desires, what made her tick and her blood run hot, to know that a little edge made her pleasure all the sweeter. At the same time, anything framed as punishment was the last thing she wanted, did quite the opposite, souring her stomach and turning her off. “Maybe?”

As if reading her reluctance for exactly what it was, Theo smiled softly. “Spankings aren’t just for bad girls, love.”

Okay, yeah, so much for being tired. Between her confession and now this, Theo’s teasing, she was wide awake. Wide awake and squirming.

Draco’s fingers bit into her hips, nails pressing into the thin skin over her hip bones, a hot spot she hadn’t know she’d had two months ago, but Merlin was the zone erogenous, a total shortcut of desire. He leaned in, his lips brushing the shell of her ear. “You like that, hmm? Want to throw yourself over Theo’s knee and let him turn your arse crimson, don’t you, Granger? You Gryfffindors can’t get enough of the color red, can you?”

_Fuck._ “Please.”

Theo hummed. “Please, what?”

There was courage, and then there was asking Theo to spank her. Bloody hell. Speaking of the color crimson, her face had to be a stunning shade of it. “Theo.”

“Good girls ask for what they want, love.” Theo tapped the tip of her nose. “If you’re brave enough to tell me you love me, you can ask me this.”
She was brave, but more than that, Theo cared about her. He’d never put her in a position where she might fall, not unless he’d be right there, waiting to catch her.

It was appealing, the idea of giving herself up, making herself vulnerable, handing Theo the reins, letting him control her pleasure and all its nuances. Really, wasn’t that what love was? Making yourself vulnerable, trusting the other person with not only your heart, but all the shadowy crevices that lurked inside you? To an extent, she’d already done that, but there were things she hadn’t said, things she wanted that she hadn’t voiced and she’d bet she wasn’t the only one. “I want to be good.”

Theo dipped his hand between her thighs, his middle finger parting her folds, dipping into her wetness and tracing a path up her slit. She bit her lip, swallowing her groan when he stopped just shy of her clit. “I know you do, and you are, love. Every time you hand over control, every time you place your pleasure in my hands, it’s such a privilege. Your trust means everything to me.”

Draco kissed the back of her neck, just over the top knob of her spine. His tongue raked across her nape, the slick drag of it against her skin making her shoulders arch and bow, her muscles splaying and flexing as she danced against the mattress.

Trust meant everything to all three of them, she’d wager. How could it not when they all, at one point or another, had put their trust in someone who’d failed them, broken that trust? To open themselves up, to risk their hearts after everything they’d been through—some of which had been dealt at one of the other’s hand—Gods, wasn’t that the ultimate showing of love?

The heat between her legs merged with the warmth in her chest, making her hot all over. Under it all was that ever present tug beneath her breastbone and her naval that seemed to grow stronger by the day. Compatibility, yes, but Narcissa had also called it an affinity and that word felt right, but even that didn’t do the strength of the feeling justice. There were moments, like now, where the pull was so strong she could scarcely breathe, where it felt like she had to touch Draco or Theo, get as close to them as humanly possible, or else she’d burst, accidentally discharge her magic like she hadn’t since before first year. When she was close to them, Gods forbid when she touched them, the feeling was as electrifying as it was grounding.

She skimmed her fingers over Theo’s ribs and pressed them to the subtle indentation at the base of the line bisecting his pectorals. His heartbeat was strong and steady beneath her fingertips, just as strong and sure as Draco’s heartbeat against her back. Something inside her quieted even as she tingled all over. Magic.

“Is it always going to be like this?” she asked, rocking her hips, trying to get Theo to touch her where she ached most. “Will it always feel like this? When we’re close, when we touch?”

Not a question she wanted to ask Narcissa, no matter how open and welcoming she’d been.

Draco nipped the lobe of her ear, breath hot against her neck. “I imagine it’ll only get stronger.”

She whimpered at the thought. Stronger? Merlin.

“Definitely stronger.” Theo trailed his fingers back through her wetness, away from her clit, but he made up for the tease by sinking into her and curling. Fuck. “This is potential, love. Imagine what a bond will feel like.”

Gods, how did bonded witches and wizards stop touching each other all the damn time let alone be apart for longer than an hour? Was it just that their affinity was so much stronger, or would it settle into something stable? Was that what bonding did?
She opened her mouth, whether to moan or pose the question, she wasn’t sure. But before she could even make a noise, a knock sounded against the bedroom door.

Draco swore under his breath and Theo dropped his forehead to hers with a groan.

“Draco,” Narcissa’s voice was muffled slightly by the wood of the door. “Darling, I need to speak with you. Right away.”

Her desire was dampened by the urgency in Narcissa’s voice. Apparently, Draco’s and Theo’s too, as Draco was out of bed in a flash, quickly tugging on his undershorts, foregoing a shirt entirely. Theo moved, too, pulling away and yanking his pants on before tugging the covers up to her neck for modesty. Her robes were too difficult to get into to pull on quickly. For that matter, where were her robes?

Across the room in three long strides, Draco yanked open the door. “What’s wrong?”

Narcissa seemed fine, but looks could be misleading. She was dressed in another set of impeccable robes, these pale green, and not a single hair was out of place, her chignon perfect. The only fracture in her placid visage was the slight furrow between her brows. “Nothing is wrong.” She shook her head. “An owl arrived early this morning. Here.”

She handed Draco a crisp looking piece of parchment, the seal on the back broken cleanly through the center. He took it from her, eyes darting side to side as he read. With each second that passed, Draco’s shoulders tensed until he was strung tighter than a bow string.

“Early?” he asked. “They’re letting Father out early? Today?”

His voice trembled, quivering on the last word. Her stomach dropped, churning not so much at the idea of Lucius being free, but at how Draco must be feeling. Conflicted. She hadn’t forgotten how he’d confessed to loving his father and hating parts of him, hating that he loved him. This, his unexpectedly early release from prison had to be stirring up those feelings, whipping them into overdrive.

Narcissa nodded, just once, brisk and brief. “He’s been paroled on good behavior.”

She said it like she was proud, but Draco scoffed. “Good behavior, my arse. Anyone look at the family vault lately? I’d wager we’re a few galleons lighter, Mother.”

“Draco,” Narcissa admonished. “There has been no bribery. Your father has served his time—”

“Part of his time.” He sneered.

“Nine months of a twelve-month sentence,” she said. “And if you read the end of the missive, you know the Ministry has tacked those additional months on to his house arrest. Azkaban is full, Draco. The Ministry needs the space for truly dangerous criminals.”

Draco shook his head, his lips pressed so tightly together they were white at the close.

“Darling,” Narcissa dropped her voice. “This family has lost so much already—”

“And others haven’t?” he asked.

Narcissa clasped her hands together in front of her stomach, fingers lacing, trembling. “Draco, please.”
He rolled his shoulders, nostrils flaring as he sucked a breath in. “If you’re asking me to help you roll out the carpet and welcome him with open arms, you’re going to be disappointed, Mother.”

“You won’t leave, will you?” The question was so quiet, Hermione could barely hear it. “Please don’t do anything rash.”

A muscle in his jaw ticked, bulging as he ground his teeth together. “Fine.”

“You’ll talk to him?” Narcissa reached for him, taking his hand. She held it tightly between hers.

“And say what?” he asked, shaking his head.

“Anything,” Narcissa said. “The truth, Draco. Scream at him for all I care, but you need to talk to him.”

He huffed. “And I suppose you’re going to tell me I need to listen, too?”

Her eyes flitted over to the bed and back. Narcissa didn’t say anything, but she continued to clutch Draco’s hand like a lifeline.

“Fine. I’ll be down shortly.” Draco stepped back until she released him, her hands hovering in the air before floating down to her sides.

Narcissa nodded tightly. As soon as they were both clear of the threshold, Draco shut the door quietly. Without so much as looking at either Theo or her, he stalked over to the bathroom and with far less restraint, slammed the door. The reverberation of wood against wood made her flinch.

Theo sighed heartily. “Fuck.”

Chapter End Notes

Eeek :) Next update will be posted in a day or so, promise!
Chapter Twenty-Two

A/N: Hi everyone! I hope your 2019 is off to a great start. And if not, time is a silly concept anyway. Just start fresh tomorrow :) 

I hope you enjoy this chapter!

Theo paced in front of the bathroom door, hands gripping his hair at the root and pulling.

Draco had locked himself in the bathroom, silent for the last twenty minutes. Theo had said he needed space, needed a few minutes to pull himself together, but twenty minutes was about ten minutes longer than she’d have given him. Fifteen, if she was being honest. Fine, her first inclination had been to rush after him as soon as he’d shut the door. Her restraint at this point was nothing short of miraculous.

“Theo,” she whispered. He glanced up, pausing his pacing. “Come here. Please.”

She patted the bed beside her when he cocked his head, looking reluctant to leave his post. After a moment, he crossed the room and took a seat next to her, his whole body stiff.

“He just needs a few more minutes,” he muttered, but it didn’t even sound like he believed the words.

The inside flesh of her cheek would be raw soon if she didn’t quit biting it. “Is that what he told you, that he needs time?”

Not now, not this occurrence, but maybe he’d said it before.

Theo shrugged tightly. “He gets like this sometimes, you know that. He needs to process.”

Not the answer to her question.

“He doesn’t like to talk about this, his father. I’m not saying we haven’t, trust me, we have, but…” Theo pinched the bridge of his nose. “There’s nothing I can do when he gets like this, Hermione.”

Oh. She went very still, her brain whirring in overdrive.

There were two separate issues at play, two intertwining issues, but not one in the same. Maybe Theo was too close to see the situation for what it was.

“I don’t think Draco needs space,” she whispered. “I think that might be the last thing he needs right now.”

Theo looked like he was going to argue, but she shook her head.

“Think about it,” she said. “Draco’s always had to be stoic and cool, especially during the past few years. He had to lock down his emotions, secret them away, you said so yourself.”

Theo nodded.
“I think what he needs is to know it’s okay to be vulnerable. That he doesn’t have to be strong all the time, especially not with us.” She took a deep breath, bracing for Theo’s reaction to what she had to say next. “Draco’s always needed to be strong and you...you never really had the opportunity.”

How could he have, when for so long he’d been subject to the brutality of his father? Survival was a strength unto itself, yes, but he’d never been able to come into his own, exhibit control. No wonder he craved it, needed it now. And he was so good at it, so strong, stronger than he knew.

Theo shook his head, jaw clenching. “There’s nothing I can do.”

“But there is,” she argued. “Draco needs to know he can lean on you, that’s it. Just be there for him. That’s what you can do. He needs to know being vulnerable doesn’t make him weak and even if it did, there’s nothing wrong with it. You can give him that. You’ve done it before, picked up the pieces and put him back together.”

Theo huffed. “What, when he and I first fucked?” He shook his head, self-deprecation coloring his words. “Oh yes, I’m great for that. Strong in the sack. Bloody perfect.”

“Stop it.” She grabbed his arm, tugged until he looked at her. Her chest panged at the torment darkening his eyes. He and Draco were both torturing themselves and they didn’t need to. “It’s so much more than that, and you know it. It’s not just the sex, Theo, and even when it is I don’t think you have any idea what’s it like. I’m never not thinking, you know, and sometimes it’s like my thoughts are in overdrive. Maybe it’s because...after everything, after needing to think a mile a minute, I don’t know how to slow down. When you tell me what to do, when you take control, I don’t have to worry, not about anything. Do you know what a gift that is? You make me feel safe. I always feel safe when I’m with you. I have a feeling it’s the same with Draco, he just needs to know it’s okay for him to let go.”

Theo scraped his hand over his mouth and chin. “What if he doesn’t let me in?”

She smiled softly. “Since when do you take no for an answer?”

“I do, on occasion.” He returned her smile with one of his own. “No is simply seldom the right answer.”

Trailing her palm down his arm, she let her hand rest atop his. He turned his hand over and laced their fingers together.

“I really do that?” Theo asked after a moment. “I make you feel safe?”

He sounded skeptical, but like he desperately wanted to believe her.

She nodded. “You do.” She paused. “Which isn’t to say Draco doesn’t, he does, but differently. It’s difficult to explain. It’s like...you’re a protego and Draco’s an arresto momementum or maybe a molliare.”

Theo laughed. “A cushioning charm? He does like to cuddle.”

“You know what I mean,” she said. Though he wasn’t wrong. Draco did love to cuddle.

He nodded. “I do. It’s the same with you, I hope you know. You make me feel safe.”

A lump formed in her throat, making it tricky to swallow let alone speak. “I do?”
“You do.” Theo stroked his thumb over the back of her hand. “Suffice it to say, neither Draco nor myself open up to just anyone. I know I speak for the both of us when I say, it’s not always easy, but you make it feel like we can. And it doesn’t feel like you judge us. Merlin, you’ve seen us at our worst. Everything’s up from there.”

“I don’t judge you,” she promised. “I love you. All of you, even the parts of yourselves you don’t like very much.”

Theo blinked hard and looked up and away, lashes fluttering quickly. But he squeezed her fingers, squeezed them so tightly her bones creaked, not that she minded. He let out his breath, air hissing through his teeth in one long stream, and then sniffed hard, rolling his neck. “I think—I think Draco needs to hear you say that.”

She’d said it before, perhaps not in those exact words. Maybe he needed the reminder, needed it now more than ever, needed it said in a way it couldn’t be misconstrued, the assurance batted aside. His tenuous relationship with his father was a sore spot and Lucius’s imminent return home seemed to have opened up old wounds. Maybe it wouldn’t happen overnight, but she and Theo would help him knit those wounds back together, heal.

Answering his squeeze with one of her own, she tugged on his fingers and urged him to follow as she slipped off the bed. He held her hand as she crossed the room, following her all the way to the bathroom door.

She rested her palm against the smooth wood. “Draco.”

No answer. Not that she was surprised.

She cleared her throat and raised her voice. “Draco, please. Open the door.”

Silence.

Behind her, Theo sighed. “Come on, Draco. Don’t do this.”

She bit her lip. Her eyes stung knowing that Draco was hurting, hurting so badly and didn’t want to let them see. “Please.”

Even her sinuses burned as the seconds ticked by. As much as she’d told Theo they wouldn’t take no for an answer, force would make this harder. It would be so much better if Draco let them in rather than if they pressed. Too much force and he might lock up, guard his emotions even more closely.

Just when it seemed they had a choice to make—use force or surrender, the lock released, the catch slackening as the door squeaked open, just an inch. But that inch was sweet, represented so much more. A much greater distance had been breached, metaphorically.

Pressing gently, Hermione opened the door the rest of the way. Across the room leaning over the sink with his hands braced against the marble countertop, Draco looked like he was barely holding it together. Head bowed, he didn’t look up, didn’t move at all save for the rhythmic rise and fall of his shoulders as he breathed heavily.

She squeezed Theo’s fingers and released his hand before stepping cautiously into the bathroom. Clearly he knew they were there, he’d unlocked the door after all, but he could still change his mind, decide to close himself off. That would be unacceptable.

Words were needed, certainly, but uttering them now would do nothing but bounce off Draco.
They needed to breach the shield he’d erected around himself first.

Reaching Draco’s side, close enough to see the catch in his breath make his shoulders tremble, she wrapped her arms around him and buried her face in his side. His skin was clammy under her palms. He cleared his throat. “I’m fine.”

No. No, he wasn’t. She shook her head, holding him tighter. “You’re not, and that’s okay, Draco. You don’t have to be fine.”

Her neck prickled, a sixth sense flaring. Warmth at her back preceded Theo’s touch, one hand falling to the small of her back as he wrapped his other arm around Draco. “You don’t have to hold it together, not in front of us.”

“Certainly not for us,” she added.

“You’re so strong all the time,” Theo said. “Let us be strong for you for once, you stubborn git.”

Draco’s breath whooshed out of him, his body trembling before going lax. He sniffed loudly. “’m not a git, you arse.”

She bit her lip to keep from smiling. They weren’t out of the woods, not yet.

“Then talk to us,” Theo said.

Moving slowly, Draco unfolded himself from over the counter. She and Theo stepped back, giving him space to turn. His eyes were rimmed red and glassy, his fair skin splotched pink and puffy beneath his eyes, his nose red and swollen. Every inch of his face revealed his pain, pain he fought to mask. It was a losing battle, one he didn’t need to fight in the first place. Jaw clenched, Draco stared off to the side, nostrils flaring.

Theo grabbed him by the chin and slipped a hand around his neck, holding him in place, making it impossible for him to hide. “Draco, love, talk to us. Please.”

Draco’s lips wobbled and he blinked fast, his pale lashes fluttering like snitch wings against his skin. His throat bobbed. “I’m scared.”

Her heart cracked clean in half and she reached out, setting her hands on his arm, needing to feel him.

For a brief moment, Theo looked frazzled at the confession, but he reeled it in and nodded briskly, his jaw spasming. “Okay. That’s okay.”

“It is,” she agreed. “Do you want to tell us why?”

Draco snorted. “Not particularly.”

Theo leaned in, pressing their foreheads together. “Well, you’re going to, you hear? So we can make this easy or we can do it the hard way.”

Draco’s eyes narrowed peevishly and for a moment it looked like he was going to argue, maybe pick a fight. Her breath caught, but just as quickly as his ire had come, it disappeared, draining from him as he slumped in Theo’s hold. He shut his eyes. “You know why, Theo.”

She certainly didn’t, but she kept her mouth shut, letting Theo take the lead.

“Come on.” Theo tugged on Draco’s shoulders, keeping his hands on him as he urged him to sit,
both lowering to their bums against the cold marble floor. When they were both seated, Theo looked up at her, nodding to the ground, silently urging her to follow suit. “I have an idea, but you should tell Hermione.”

Draco shuddered, blinking fast. She reached out, grabbing his hand, the one Theo wasn’t holding. She let their hands rest against her thigh. With a degree of patience that made her stomach ache, she kept quiet, silently drawing runes on the back of his hand.

Counting each heartbeat in her head, she reached two-hundred-and-sixty-four before Draco spoke.

“My father’s coming home,” he muttered.

She nodded, squeezing his fingers as if hugging them with her hand.

Was that what he was afraid of? Lucius? His feelings were complicated, but to be afraid of the man?

Draco took a deep breath in, letting it out quietly. “I’m not afraid of him.”

Okay, well, there went that theory.

“My father doesn’t have a history of making good decisions.” Draco shook his head, tongue poking into his cheek. “Then again, I suppose neither do I.”

She opened her mouth, but before she could speak, Theo shook his head. She bit her tongue.

“I’m not afraid of him,” he reiterated. “I’m afraid of what his return means, what’s going to happen.”

“What do you mean?” Theo asked.

Draco sighed. “Life was utter shite, for the most part. Now it’s not.”

“You’re worried things will go back to how they were?” she asked.

“No?” He shook his head. “I know better than to believe that. My father fucked up royally, but he’s not entirely to blame for the shite show the Manor became. We have the Dark Lord to thank for that, but then again, Father’s to thank for bringing the bastard into our lives to begin with.” His head dropped back, clunking against the cabinet beneath the sink. “I know it won’t be exactly like it was, but what’s going to change? It might not be like it was, but I’d be stupidly naïve to believe it will the stay exactly same.”

True. There was no way Lucius’s return, his insinuation back into the Manor and Draco’s life, wouldn’t affect something. How much, no one could know for certain.

Theo watched Draco intently, his blue eyes narrowed. “Lucius can be a right pain in the arse, I know, but you and I both know Narcissa rules this roost, Draco. What aren’t you saying?”

Draco sharply broke eye contact, staring out the window over the large tub. He took a tremulous breath in and shook his head.

Theo waited, and so she did, too. He was perceptive, eerily so, or maybe it was just artifact of knowing Draco as long as he had that he knew when he wasn’t saying everything.

Apparently, he was significantly more patient she was, too, because her willingness to sit idly withered once she counted her three-hundred-and-fifty-third heartbeat. “Draco.”
“I’m afraid of losing you, okay?” he snapped, his eyes flashing as he pinned her with a stare that made everything inside her freeze, her heart included. “It fucking terrifies me, all right? Are you happy?”

No, no she wasn’t. Her heart had splintered into a thousand fractures and several of them had speared her lungs. At least that’s what it felt like. Breathing was difficult, but maybe that was because her nose was suddenly stuffed like someone had shoved cotton into her sinuses. She blinked hard and fast. “Draco.”

Theo squeezed her fingers and she looked away, breathing in through her mouth. She couldn’t lose it, not now, not when Draco needed her.

“What makes you think you could possibly lose me?” she asked, almost gasping the words. “You think your father’s going to what—forbid you from seeing me?”

She wasn’t even going to entertain the thought of Lucius keeping them apart through more nefarious means. He might’ve been Dark, at least once upon a time, but she’d seen him in the final battle, searching diligently for Draco, not firing a single curse at any of the Order or students fighting. She’d reserve her judgment on Lucius’s character for a later time; Azkaban could change a man, and how much did she know about who Lucius truly was before his incarceration? Besides, Narcissa had made it sound like Lucius was—well, not displeased at their relationship. But who knew what Draco’s fears were rooted in, logical or not.

Draco scoffed. His palm had gone damp in her hand. “Let him fucking try. See what that gets him.”

“Lucius knows better than that,” Theo said. “He knows where your loyalties lie and Narcissa’s for that matter, too.”

Draco pressed his lips together and shrugged. “So?”

So that meant Draco wasn’t afraid that Lucius would throw a wrench in their relationship…at least not in the way she’d first thought.

Theo was on the same page, apparently. “What makes you worried you’re going to lose her then?”

Draco’s chin quivered before he set his jaw. “Just because Father doesn’t send her away doesn’t mean she won’t leave.”

Leave, as in of her own volition? Everything inside her revolted, her heart battering itself against her sternum like an angry kick drum. “Draco, I’m not going anywhere.”

He scoffed. “You say that now.”

“And I mean it.” She released Theo’s hand and shifted, rolling to her knees. The marble was cold and unforgiving beneath her kneecaps as she crouched beside him, close as she could get without crawling into his lap, a tempting prospect. Instead, she clutched his hand to her chest where that tugging sensation rooted. “I love you, Draco. Nothing is going to make me leave you, do you understand me?”

Only seconds before Narcissa had knocked on the door, they’d been talking about their future, how right it felt. Gods, they’d talked about children. How could he possibly think she’d leave?

Draco’s eyes snapped shut, face pinking as the rise and fall of his chest quickened. “You didn’t always. I was terrible.”
Yes, but neither had he, loved her, that was. Point being, she loved him now, and moreover, she’d forgiven him ages ago. He’d learned the error of his ways, and even then he’d only been awful to her because of how he’d been raised—

Oh.

Gods, talk about sudden startling clarity.

“Draco.” Fuck it. She dropped his hand and threw her leg over his, climbing into his lap. Hands clutching each side of his face, she stared into his eyes. “You are not your father, do you hear me? You are your own person and I love the man you’ve become. I wouldn’t be with you if I didn’t trust you implicitly. You aren’t going to hurt me. You’re a good man, an amazing person, and you’ve grown so much. I’m so proud of you, Draco.”

He blinked, stunned, looking like she’d sucker punched him. His lips quivered when he spoke, “But I am like him. I spent most of my life imitating him, doing anything and everything I could to be like him.”

“I didn’t say you weren’t similar in some ways.” Draco flinched but she carried on. “You’re ambitious, and you’re resourceful, and you have an appreciation for the finer things in life.”

He scoffed. “Lovely. I’m a refined areshole? A prat with good taste?”

“You’re also loyal to the people you love and you’re willing to do whatever it takes to keep them safe.”

Draco shook his head the best he could with her holding him in place. “My father put this family in jeopardy, Hermione.”

“Yes, he did.” She nodded. “But I also saw him look more afraid than I’ve ever seen him when he and your mother were looking for you during the battle. I’ve never seen a man look so terrified before, Draco, and it was because he cares about you.”

“He has a funny way of showing it,” he whispered.

This was going so well. She looked over her shoulder at Theo, arching a brow.

Theo nodded and slid closer. “Do you intend to go back to calling Hermione a mudblood?”

Merlin. She flinched, but her reaction paled in comparison to Draco’s. He pulled an about face and glared daggers at Theo. “No. Of course not and fuck you for even suggesting it.”

Theo glared right back until… the tension bled from Draco’s body, there and gone, his shoulders slumping as he realized the full magnitude of Theo’s question and his own answer. His fears were illogical and it seemed he understood now. It took Theo’s goading for him to understand.

Theo shrugged, his glare softening, expression going tender. “Don’t do this to yourself, Draco. Quit looking for reasons to hate yourself at every turn.”

“I love you so much, Draco,” she said. “Even the parts you aren’t so fond of, the parts you might even hate. They make you who you are and I wouldn’t trade any of it for the world. But you are more than your misdeeds, do you hear me? You are so much more.”

Draco’s chin quivered.
Theo nodded. “We love you, but you’ve got to stop torturing yourself. You have no idea how badly it hurts when you do that.”

“I know it’s not easy, nor is it your natural inclination, but talk to us.” She brushed his hair away from his forehead. “Please.”

Draco blinked rapidly, but despite his efforts a few renegade tears spilled over. He turned his head and made to lift his arm, but Theo grabbed his hand, thwarting him. He reached up, brushing the tears away himself. “And you don’t have to have it together all the time, either. Fuck anyone who says otherwise. We might have more baggage than most people, but the luckily there are three of us to share the load.”

She nodded. On so many levels, they were fortunate. She counted her lucky stars she had them, that her choices and theirs had brought them together, and she’d do anything to make sure nothing ever came between them. Not outside forces, not their own fears. Nothing.

Draco breathed deep and met both their stares. His silver eyes were bloodshot, his face pink and feverishly warm, but his lips quirked subtly at the corners. “Are you going to make me hug it out now?”

A brilliant idea. She threw her arms around his shoulders and buried her face in his neck, breathing him in. Theo snorted and curled his arms around her, sandwiching her between his and Draco’s bodies as he hugged them both tightly. Draco chuckled beneath his breath, but his arms wiggled out from where she was pressed against him and wrapped around her and Theo.

“We’re turning into bloody Hufflepuffs,” he mumbled.

Theo scoffed. “Speak for yourself.”

“I’m joking,” he whispered. “I like hugs.”

“So do I,” she said.

Theo hummed. “I, for one, am fond of anything that leads to touching either of you, so…”

They all laughed.

Despite his adoration of hugs, Draco was the first to break away. He leaned back against the cabinet, lids drooping, the exhaustion of the morning settling in. He scratched his jaw, wincing a little as his fingertips dragged through the shadowed casting of blond scruff. “I need to shave.”

Theo hummed. “Do us a favor and shower, too, while you’re at it.”

Draco scoffed. “I smell just fine, thank you.”

“You smell like sex,” Theo clarified. “We all smell like sex. Not that I’m complaining, but eau de pussy and spunk isn’t acceptable cologne, no matter how badly I wish it was.”

Oh Gods. She covered her face with a hand. “You opened the door in your boxers, Draco. Your mother saw me wrapped in a sheet. Brilliant.”

His lips twitched. “She wants grandbabies. Everyone knows practice makes perfect.”

She dropped her forehead to his shoulder and groaned.

“It could’ve been worse,” Theo’s tone was much too light. “Narcissa could’ve caught you
buggering her precious baby boy in the library. Not that that’s happened or anything.”

Draco’s shoulder shook, jostling her head. “She had the hardest time making eye contact with you.”

“She wouldn’t look at me for a week,” Theo groused. “Then again, that paled in comparison to the time she caught you fucking me in the solarium. She ignored me for twelve days.”

“Not like she looked me in the eye, either. It was all that sunlight, I think. At least the library provided…shadows so she didn’t have to see your pale arse thrusting.”

She bit her lip, but a giggle slipped out.

“Someone thinks that’s funny, does she?” Theo hummed and then his hands were scrambling against her ribs, ticking her senseless.

“Stop it!” she shrieked.

Draco groaned. “Yeah, stop it. You’re giving me a lap dance, Granger. My dick is very confused this morning, let me say.”

“You poor thing.” She whispered in his ear, wiggling her bottom for good measure.

His hands went to her hips, holding her still. “Killing me here, love.”

Theo laughed. “Okay, children, that’s enough. Before you start snogging on the bathroom floor, Draco needs to get up.” He clapped his hands. “Game plan. Draco’s going to shower and shave. I’m going to ask Milly to bring us up something to eat—”

“And tea,” she said. “Please.”

“Yes, and tea,” Theo agreed. “Draco’s going to get some food in him and then he’s going to go see his mother.”

*And father.*

“Did the note say when Lucius would be arriving?” she asked.

Draco cleared his throat. “The aurors are delivering him at ten thirty.”

Soon, then.

She lifted her head and turned, peering over her shoulder. “And what are you and I to do?”

They were just going to leave Draco to…what? Greet—confront?—his father alone? Narcissa would be there, granted, but Lucius was her husband and despite what he’d done, she clearly loved him dearly. She’d be overwrought enough by his homecoming; who would be there for Draco?

“Then Draco can show you the library,” Draco said. “Right, Theo?”

Theo nodded. “I can do that.”

“Shouldn’t we—”

He shook his head.

Draco trailed a finger down the side of her neck. “I’ll be fine.”
She turned her head, brow furrowed. Seriously? This again? This *I’ll be fine* nonsense?

He pressed a finger to her lips. “I’m not just saying it, I mean it. *I will* be fine. I’m not saying it’s going to be a walk in the park, but as long as I know you’ll be here—the both of you—when I’m through, I’ll be okay.”

A terrible curiosity seized her, making her itch. “What are you going to say to him?”

How could Draco possibly hash out years of frustration and anger, disappointment and pain, love and hero worship in one conversation? How would Lucius react? Would he rage right back, or take it on the chin with a haughty indignation? Would he even be up for any of that, or would all those months in Azkaban have made him too weary, too weak to withstand such a confrontation? It wasn’t really her business, but Draco cared and she cared about him so maybe it was her business.


Whatever that meant, indeed.

Part of her wanted to press the issue. Did he want them there, Theo and her? No, he needed to face his father and he needed to do it on his own, just him and Lucius face to face. Her intervention would do nothing but muck up the conversation, sway its course. But they were here for him now, and they be there for him later, after. She bit her lip. “The library, you said?”

Draco smiled, eyes brightening for the first time since his mother had knocked on the door. “You’ll love it. I promise.”

It was a library. *Of course* she would.
Chapter Twenty-Three

Her breath quickened, saliva pooling beneath her tongue. She swallowed, pulse stuttering in her throat. Merlin, Morgana, and all four founders. “Theo, it’s huge.”

Theo chuckled and tugged on her fingers. “Come on, my little bibliophile. Wait until you see the view from the second floor. You’ll soak clean through your knickers.”

She bit the inside of her lip and let Theo guide her through the most magnificent personal library she’d ever been inside. Gods, the place was not only enormous but stunning, dark wooden shelves filled from top to bottom with books, spines all neatly arranged, not a single volume out of place. Of course the Hogwarts library was larger, but the Malfoy library was uniquely impressive in that there were books she’d never actually seen before, books she’d heard of, but were rare in their antiquity, first editions and tomes no longer in print, volumes she’d spotted in the restricted section but never had the time, reason, or gumption to peek at. She could spend a lifetime in the stacks here and there’d still be books to spare.

She wasn’t sure whether to weep or swoon at the thought of there simply not being enough time.

Theo led her up an ornately carved spiral staircase—Gods, were those braided snakes on the handrail? Apparently Narcissa hadn’t remodeled this room, but in all honesty, Hermione didn’t mind. The dark décor gave the place a nearly forbidden quality reminiscent of the entire restricted section in a way that…okay, her knickers were a little damp, but Theo didn’t need to know. He’d tease her mercilessly—to the second story of the library. Releasing her hand, he slipped an arm around her waist and brought her over to the balcony-like catwalk that overlooked the first floor.

“Oh.” She sighed. “This is brilliant, Theo. I’m—wow.”

“Speechless, hmm?” Theo kissed the side of her neck and nuzzled the space her ear with his nose. “Draco and I figured you’d like it.”

Like it? She bloody loved it. When could she move in?

“I don’t even know where to start,” she whispered. A place this magnificent deserved a special reverence, a solemn veneration one would afford a church. The windows were stained glass, adorned in vibrant jewel tones that gave the place a cathedral-like quality. She wasn’t religious, but if she was? This library would be her altar and she’d be damned if she didn’t worship at it as often as possible.

Theo hummed, the vibration of it traveling from his lips to her throat. “Want a suggestion?”

She nodded, gaze sweeping out over the first floor. Shelves upon shelves lined the space in a neat maze that funneled to a seating area complete with several chaises and a rather comfy looking leather chair she wouldn’t mind curling up in, all circled around a fireplace. “Please.”

“Okay, come on.” Theo tugged her away from the railing, down a row, and around a corner. The
books here were absolutely ancient, preserved granted, but the leather spines were cracked and peeling around the edges from a time before they’d been placed under stasis charms and other protection spells. Theo scanned the shelves, brow furrowed and lips pursed before his face smoothed, eyes brightening. “Here.”

He plucked a small, black leather book from the middle of the shelf, ran his palm over the cover with a gentle veneration that made her heart thud, and passed it to her with a smile.

*The Adventures of Hanky the Hinkypunk and Friends.* She traced the gold-foiled title and cocked her head. “Children’s stories? Like Beedle the Bard?”

Theo scoffed. “These are infinitely better than Beedle the Bard, Hermione. His work is utterly derivative of Wysheued’s work.”

“*Derivative?* Beedle the Bard published his work in the fifteenth century,” she said.

Theo tapped the cover, his handsome face incredibly smug. “Twelfth century.”

“Are you serious?” She carefully opened the cover. Old English rhymes filled the pages, like the Canterbury Tales, but hopefully not as bawdy. Amazingly, as her eyes skimmed the page, the Old English text shimmmered from black to gold and back again, shifting into Modern English. An enchanted book, charmed to translate, Merlin. She laughed. “This is amazing.”

“Isn’t it?” Theo smiled softly, almost wistfully. “I…well, I don’t remember my mother, she died when I was three, but I’m pretty sure she read me these. I had a copy, a bit rattier looking than this one, but there was an inscription from her to me written in the cover.” He paused and wet his lips. “*To Theodore, From Mother with Love.* I didn’t have anything else of hers, so sometimes I’d”—he chuckled mirthlessly—“I’d trace the words she’d written, those six little words, and I’d fantasize about what it would be like, what my life would be like, if she was still alive. How different everything might be. Sometimes I’d try to imagine her saying it, those words.” He rolled his lips together, throat bobbing. “My father caught me at it. Told me to stop acting like a pansy, that it was time for me to man up, and then he tossed it in the fireplace. I was seven.”

Her throat narrowed, eyes stinging even as her stomach hardened. She’d never hated someone more, not even Bellatrix fucking Lestrange. Azkaban was too good a fate for that man. “*Theo.*”

He shook his head and laid his hand over hers atop the pages of this priceless, precious book. “It’s not the same, granted, but I’m glad to have a copy, unfettered access to one at least. It’s a little silly, I know, but it’s my favorite book.”

It wasn’t silly, not one bit. She blinked fast and hard and shook her head. “I bet your mother would be really proud of you, Theo.”

Theo dropped his head back, blinking up at the ceiling. He sniffed hard and sighed loudly before straightening. “I want my children to know these stories. It’s…it’s important to me.”

“Yes. Of course. They should. They will, Theo.” She’d bloody memorize them, learn the stories until she could recite them in her sleep. She had time.


She shook her head. “Don’t. Don’t apologize. Please.”

Theo laughed, the sound watery, his voice on the verge of breaking. “I had this plan to seduce you in the stacks, get your mind off everything, not make you cry. Fuck.”
“Theo.” She reached up, setting her hand against his jaw. “I love you. I need you to know that.”

Now that she’d said it, she wanted to keep saying it, couldn’t seem to stop saying the words.

He set his hand over hers, holding it to his face. “I do. I know. And I love you, too. More than you can possibly know, Hermione.”

Pressing up on her toes, she closed the distance between them and kissed him gently, her lips pillowing against his lower lip, the book of fairytales cradled gently between them. Theo exhaled Shakily and returned the kiss, his hand shifting to rest against the back of her neck, holding her softly as if she was precious, too.

Plopping back on her heels, she licked her lips, savoring Theo’s unique flavor, and handed him the book. “Hold on to this for me? I want to read it later.”

He nodded. “Sure. I want to show you something else, anyway.”

“Lead the way.”

Theo tucked the small black book into the pocket of his jacket and held out his hand for her once more. When her hand was secured in his, he led the way to another shelf, still on the second floor, this one on the opposite side of the room, hidden away in a shadowed corner. He tapped on the third shelf from the bottom and again on the second shelf. “Quite possibly the largest personal collection of books on bonds, marriage bonds, specifically.” When she arched a brow, he shrugged. “Narcissa likes to read, what can I say? And she might’ve suggested Draco and I show you. Narcissa isn’t one to be denied. You have to have figured that out by now.”

“Mhmm.” She grinned and plucked a fat plum-colored volume from the shelf. *Marriage Rites and Magical Bonds: Handfastenings for the Nineteenth Century.* “Sure she did.”

“She did.” He took the book from her and shoved it back on to the shelf.

“So all of these books?” She trailed her finger across the spines. “All of them are about marriage bonds?”

Theo nodded and pulled another book off the shelf. He winced. “Okay, apparently some are just about wedding planning, but most are about bonds.” The book Theo had removed from the shelf was covered in a floral dust-jacket. *Wedding Planning for the Modern Witch.* He shrugged. “Like I said, Narcissa wanted me to show you.”

She shook her head and grabbed a different book from the shelf, this one dark blue and unassuming. *Marriage bonds and Compulsions: A Magical Guide to Matrimony.* “Oh, this one looks interesting.”


She plucked it from him and nodded, eyes roving the dust jacket. “I think I’d like to read both of these.”

Theo took them from her. “I’ll hold them for you. Just keep browsing. I’m going one shelf over, okay?”

She nodded and trailed her fingers along the spines, lips curling at the titles, some a bit sillier than other. *Magical Ménages and Menageries.* Merlin, the author must’ve missed the memo that there
was such a thing as too much alliteration.

Exploring by touch, Hermione ran her fingers along the polished shelves, pausing when her fingertips caught on a rough spot—a knot in the wood? She backtracked, rubbing at the incongruence, fingers tingling until—Merlin. The shelf shifted, a drawer dropping out from a false bottom, two texts contained within its depths. She reached out, fingers curling into fists as she just barely restrained herself from touching. “Theo.”

He ducked around the corner, brows raised. “Yeah?”

She nodded at the shelf. “Erm, this just…appeared?”

Was it safe to touch? She wasn’t looking to lose any fingers to cursed drawers or what might lie within.

Theo stopped beside her and cocked his head. His forehead furrowed, brows nearly meeting before he laughed. “Congratulations, you found the sex shelf.”

“The sex shelf?” She scoffed. “What in the bloody hell is the sex shelf?”

“Sex magic. Secreted away from prying eyes.” Theo smirked, eyes rolling when she glared. She had stumbled on it, there had been no prying. “You’ve got to have at least read about it, yeah?”

Sex magic? No, she hadn’t. She’d wondered if perhaps there had been a branch of magic dedicated to the subject, but she hadn’t given it more than a passing thought. “No, I haven’t.”

Theo grabbed the books from the little hidden alcove. It disappeared as soon as the books were gone from the compartment. He glanced at one title and then the other, shrugging. “We’ve got one on theoretical sex magic, another on practical. You’ve seriously never read these?”

“When would I have had the chance?” She shook her head. “Wait, have you? Have you…tried something from this?”

He frowned. “I suppose you’re right. I forget these texts aren’t exactly…common.”

“Are they dark?” She bit the inside of her cheek. She was no stranger to the Restricted Section, true. But every time she’d ventured into the Restricted Section, she’d had some looming goal, a life or death topic that needed researching. She’d never read dark texts for...for pleasure reading.

Theo shook his head. “Sex magic isn’t dark, not inherently at least. Then again, no magic is dark by default.”

“The Unforgivables?” she offered.

He pursed his lips. “Euthanasia? Death with dignity? Shades of gray, yeah?” He paused. “Okay, fine, the Cruciatius is dark. I believe we can both agree on that.”

She shivered and nodded. “So sex magic is neutral?”

“Like anything, it comes down to consent.” Theo shrugged. “You might favor something someone else finds abhorrent, and something might strike my fancy that turns someone else right off. Sex magic is no different than sex—different strokes for different folks.”

Again, fair. “It isn’t common, though?”

Or was she missing some massive component to being a witch that involved having sex differently
than Muggles? Oh Gods, had she been doing it wrong? No, no, she was quite pleased and so were Draco and Theo, clearly.

Theo shrugged and laughed. “Someone usually tries something rudimentary by third year and it usually warns everyone else off, yeah?”

She shook her head. “What do you mean?”

His nose scrunched. “In the boys’ dormitories. Someone always tries to engorgio themselves. Inevitably the counter spell doesn’t work, or it works a little too well, if you catch my drift. Everyone quickly realizes wands and…wands don’t mesh well, not unless you’ve got a firm grasp of the basics.”

Poor Madame Pompfrey. Being a school nurse to pubescent pupils was surely difficult enough without adding magic and curiosity to the mix. Merlin, the woman was a saint for holding it together. She chuckled. “The basics of spell work, or the basics of sex?”

Theo smirked. “Both? Though, you probably shouldn’t try anything from that text”—he nodded at the second book, a slim volume called Practical Magic: Sex and Intimacy—“not unless you’ve got at least an Exceeds Expectations on your O.W.Ls in Charms and Transfiguration, I’d wager.”

She traced the spine and pursed her lips. “I received an Outstanding in both those subjects.”

He arched a brow. “Curious, eh?”


Theo smiled. “I have.”

Interesting. “Like what?”

Theo shrugged. “A few things.”

“Have you read it?” She shook the book gently. “This book?”

He nodded. “The Nott library had a copy, but it was confiscated over the summer, apprehended along with all the Dark artifacts in my father’s possession.”

She aimed a sharp glare his way and swallowed tightly. “I thought you just said sex magic wasn’t inherently dark?”

“It’s not.” He shook his head. “Like anything, sex can be utilized as a weapon in the wrong hands. The Ministry didn’t want the wrong sort of people having access to a veritable how-to-guide, I wager.”

“You’re telling me I couldn’t go into Flourish and Blotts and find this? Or something like it?”

Theo shrugged. “Eh, you could find a watered down kama sutra with a few vanilla spells that would sate the curiosities of most witches and wizards, but that’s about it. This”—he nodded at the book in her hands—“is restricted section stuff. You used to be able to find these in Knockturn Alley, but like I said, the Ministry’s cracked down. Fat lot of good that’s going to do by the way. What’s off limits is always more tempting.”

True.

“Anyway, I think most old families have copies, unless they’ve been discovered and consequently
confiscated. I’d wager there’s one secreted away in Grimmauld somewhere. The Blacks were kinky fuckers, as far rumors go.”

She bit her lip and stared down at the book in her hands. A text few others had access to, rare material, not inherently dark, but containing knowledge not many possessed. Ooh, that was… tempting, enough to get her blood pumping, her mind zipping into overdrive.

Theo ran his fingers through her hair and smiled. “Gets you hot, doesn’t it? You haven’t even opened it and your pupils are already dilated.”

“It’s not very bright in here,” she argued.

“Sure, right.” Theo smirked. “And you’re breathing fast, because…?”

She pursed her lips. “It’s intriguing, okay?” She opened the book to a random page and...Merlin. Eyes wide, she looked up at Theo. “People do...this?”

He turned his head, skimming the page, and nodded. “Oh, sure. Definitely.”

Cheeks flushed, she shut the book and looked away. Never would she think of aqua eructo the same ever again. “Have you? Done that?”

Theo shook his head, nose wrinkling subtly. “Not that, no.”

“What have you done?” she asked, voice a little wary even to her own ears. She wanted to know, desperately, but—oh, what if she didn’t like the answer?

He grinned. “Guess.”

That meant reading the book, a prospect as terrifying as it was tempting. Theo arched a brow, all but daring her. She huffed and spun on her heel, stalking down the stairs at a quick clip. “Fine, I suppose I’ll get started.”

The chair beside the roaring fire was nearly as tall as Draco’s bed. She heaved herself up atop the leather cushion and wiggled until comfortable. Biting her lip, she turned back to the first page and began reading.

Most of the spells she already knew, simple charms repurposed for sexual use. Feather light and hover charms used to lift people, sticking charms and incarcerous to bind arms and legs and tie the body with visually intricate rope patterns. Muffliato and obscurro were used restrict the senses, and conversely supersensory charms to heighten them. Then there were the charms that raised her brows and heated her cheeks, tickling charms and aqua eructo, augamenti and the like, spells she’d never have expected to be repurposed for sex. People liked that sort of thing? Tickling and jets of water spraying from the tip of a wand into...she bit her lip. She wasn’t going to yuck anyone’s yum, but tickling was not her bag, not sexually at least. She’d probably wee and...no.

The spells, though common, were uniquely re-imagined, not to mention, there were helpful little tips beside each entry, tips to maximize pleasure, others to introduce a bit—or a lot—of pain. There was an asterisk beside that tip instructing the reader to flip to chapter nine for the section on spells and sexual sadism. She gulped. The whole thing was arousing and a little terrifying, but the parts that scared her somehow did little to dampen her arousal. Interesting, bodies were, wired in such way that pain and pleasure receptors crossed, sharing space. All she could say was thank Merlin her arousal wasn’t as obvious as a man’s, the idea of hiding her awkward arousal a daunting prospect, one she was thankful she need not worry about.
Flipping the page, she froze at the next section, a chapter unlike the rest. *Legilimency and Its Most Intimate Uses.*

Intimate was right. Giving someone unfettered, unfiltered access to the nooks and crannies of your mind was just about as intimate as it got. Could she do that, let Draco or Theo into her head, give them the opportunity to read her thoughts, her desires? Did she want to?

She bit her lip. There was something appealing about it, sharing everything without having to say it. She didn’t have anything to hide, not anymore, but there was still an inherent risk, an unmatched vulnerability. Who was to say they’d like what they saw?

Theo cleared his throat from the couch beside her chair. “Enjoying your book?”

She slipped her thumb between the pages and closed the book. “So far, yes.”

“Any guesses?”

Oh, right. She’d meant to guess what he’d done. She stared down at the cover. “Erm, *incarcerous* has some interesting uses.”

Theo smirked. “It does, doesn’t it?”

“Am I right?”

“You are.” He nodded. “Intrigued?”

She flushed, teeth sinking into her bottom lip. “A bit.”

Theo had told her he wanted to tie her up, he just hadn’t said how he planned to restrain her.

“Anything else catch your eye?”

Most of it? She lifted a shoulder. “Maybe?”

“Coy, hmm?” Theo tsked and leaned forward, setting his elbows on his knees. “Chapter seven, maybe?”

She cracked the spine, peering at the page she’d paused on. *Legilimency.* She looked up sharply, eyes narrowed. “Theo.”

He held up his hands in supplication. “Lucky guess, I swear.”

“Mhmm.” She set the book aside. “While we’re on the topic, are you a legilimens?”

She’d never asked before and now she felt silly.

Theo’s head wavered, vacillating from side to side. “I wouldn’t call myself particularly skilled…”

He arched a brow. He either was, or he wasn’t.

“Fine, yes.” He nodded. “I learned so I could help Draco with his Occlumency. I’m…proficient, I suppose.”

“Have you peeked inside my mind before?” she asked.

He shook his head briskly. “No. Never.”
“Really?” It wasn’t that she thought he was lying, but it was difficult to believe. She’d wondered before, his insight a little too on the nose, and now, knowing he was capable…


“No often, though, I swear. I never do it on purpose.” Theo tacked on, sounding a bit frazzled. “Really, it’s only happened a few times, twice, maybe three times. Otherwise, legilimency just kind of strengthens your overall sense of perception, intuition, you know?”

She rolled that over in her head. It bothered her less than she thought it would.

“So you’ve peeked inside Draco’s mind before. On purpose?”

Theo nodded.

“During sex?”

He nodded again.

That level of trust was staggering, a clear display of the love between the two of them that Draco was okay with that when he’d learned Occlumency to specifically safeguard his mind, the final fortress of his privacy when everywhere else had been invaded.

She pursed her lips. “Would you look inside mine? If I asked?”

His eyes narrowed. “For what purpose?”

She shrugged, face heating as she wrung her hands together. “You know.”

“Before, or during?” he asked.

“Either?” She bit her lip. “I don’t know. How does that even work?”

Yes, the book was beside her and no doubt chapter seven detailed the process, but Theo had actually done it. Why not go to the source?

Teeth scraping his bottom lip, Theo appeared to carefully choose his words. “It’s like…well, there’s no guessing what someone fancies, which has its pros and cons. It takes the mystery out of the equation. Yes, there’s no risk of missing your mark, but discovery can be half the fun. Not to mention, thoughts and fantasies are not consent. And you’d want to make sure you’re prepared to dive inside their mind because you might not like what you see and that could be a mood killer. Not speaking from experience on that bit, just theoretically. Imagine someone thinking your O-face is atrocious or that your breath is bad.” His nose scrunched. “But I digress. It’s better if both parties are capable of legilimency.”

“Really? How does that work?”

He shrugged. “That way there’s a bit of a feedback loop. If you’re doing it right—the sex not the legilimency—no one’s thinking straight so you just get a sense, a taste of what they’re feeling, and them you, and it sort of builds on itself. Your pleasure feeds theirs and vice versa.”

Interesting. “So Draco’s a legilimens?”
Theo nodded. “Skilled enough, yes.”

Never before had learning legilimency sounded so appealing.

“What about before sex? Like, now?” she asked.

Theo blinked twice. “Are you asking hypothetically, or was that a request?”

Both? “I believe I understand the logistics. You could see things I’m not saying.”

“Right.” Theo nodded sharply. “And you know it’s not an exact science? I could look for something specific, but thoughts aren’t arranged neatly. Certain thoughts are louder, exist at the forefront of the mind, but there’s no way to perfectly guarantee what I’d see. I mean, skilled legilimens can more accurately pinpoint thoughts, but unless you’re thinking really loudly, I’m not —”

“I get it.” She smiled. “You could see my deepest, darkest secrets.” She bit her lip and shrugged. “Kind of the point, isn’t it?”

Theo stared, blue eyes wide. “Fuck, Hermione. That’s…” He trailed off, tugging his collar as if needing the room to breathe.

“I said I trusted you. I meant it.”

“Yes, but…” Theo shook his head. “I don’t know, it doesn’t feel very fair.”

She laughed. “What, you want me to learn legilimency so we can sort it tit for tat?”

He wrinkled his nose. “Yes?”

Legilimency had always piqued her curiosity, she simply hadn’t had the means to practice, someone to practice on. Plus, she’d been slightly wary of any magic involving the mind ever since tampering with her parents’ thoughts. She’d resolved to only enter minds with consent. But if Theo was offering…

He sat up straight and gestured with a beckoning wave of his hand. “Go on.”

“Now?” She shook her head. “I haven’t prepared or—”

“Hermione.” Theo sighed. “You know how it works. I know you know. This isn’t something you study. Just try.”

Her lips pulled to the side even as she reached into her pocket for her wand. “Won’t it hurt you?”

Theo shrugged. “The better you get at it, the less it hurts when you do it. Eventually, you can slide inside someone’s head smooth as butter. It helps if the person’s willing, receptive, isn’t trying to block you.”

But it would hurt him now. She’d better get good at it, fast. “You’re sure?”

“I trust you, too, you know.” Theo wagged his brows. “I’ll focus on something fun for you, yeah? I’ll make it nice and loud, too.”

If he was trying to put her at ease, it was working…marginally. She swallowed and lifted her wand, hand trembling a smidge around the wood. Theo nodded again, lips quirking slightly. She cleared her throat and stared deeply into his eyes. “Legilimens.”
There was nothing subtle about the intrusion, just a harsh tug and suddenly she was in Theo’s head, watching through his eyes as—Merlin. Not a memory, this was a fantasy he’d focused on. There was a golden glow, a soft blurring that marked the thought as imagined, but even then she’d have known this was no memory because she was in it and this had never happened. Not yet.

Snug between Draco and Theo, she was naked, as were they. One leg crooked over Draco’s pale hip, she was writhing, panting as he fucked her and—sweet lord, Theo was gripping her hips, fingers biting into the meat of her bum as he thrust into her from behind, fucking her arse. The tempo was hypnotic, a perfectly practiced give and take, their bodies in sync, shifting and rolling, Theo’s fingers sliding from her hip to Draco, skimming up his side. All around them, the air was thick with the smell of sex and sweat, musky and sweet. Fuzzy as the edges of the fantasy were, it was clear enough that Theo thought she’d like it, her lips parted, noisy little whimpers filling the air, joining the symphony of slapping skin and grunting gasps.

The image blurred, rippling like a stone had been skipped across the surface of the vision. Suddenly she was looking at herself, wrists tied and restrained above her head with thin black ropes that stood out starkly against her skin. Her back bowed, hips arching off the bed as Theo trailed the tip of his wand along the inside of her splayed thighs. She looked utterly debauched, nipples hard enough to cut glass, tears leaking from her eyes dripping down the sides of her temples as her lips trembled. Her abdominals quivered, muscles shaking, and toes curling as she mewled loudly, clearly on the verge of coming. In the fantasy, Theo chuckled darkly and set his wand aside before slipping his fingers through her glistening folds, quickly bringing her to absolution, her scream of satisfaction filling the air as she soaked Theo’s hand and the bed beneath her with her orgasm.

Even wrecked, panting and sweating, she’d never looked as beautiful as she did inside Theo’s head.

Just as quickly as she’d slipped inside his mind, she was out of it, back in the library in the big cushy chair sitting across from Theo, breathing heavily, the back of her neck damp with sweat. Theo dropped his head into his palms and groaned.

She took a steadying breath, the sudden expulsion into reality rather jarring. “Are you all right?”

His head bobbed, nodding. “Uh huh. ‘m okay.”

He sounded awful. “Are you sure.”

“Mhmm.” He lifted his head, blinking hard. “Little headache, not bad. That was great for your first time.”

That sounded impossible, so impossible that the praise didn’t make her glow like it usually did. She must’ve looked disbelieving because he nodded. “I’m not just saying that. First time Draco got inside my head felt like someone had taken a bloody ice-pick to my brain. This was like you slid a toothpick between my hemispheres.”

Oh, and that sounded so pleasant.

Speaking of pleasant… “What was that? What you were thinking?”

She knew what it was, obviously, but did he want that? As Theo had reminded, thoughts were not consent. Some fantasies were just that, she knew, not intended to be acted upon, sweeter when not actualized. Others, though…

Theo licked his lips and shrugged, mouth quirking to the side. “I didn’t scare you, did I?”
Quite the opposite, really. Her knickers were ruined, practically drenched, and her clit was throbbing like an auxiliary heart beat between her legs. “No. I’m not scared.”

One dark brow arched. “Did you like that?”

She bit the inside of her cheek and shrugged. “It was interesting, seeing myself through your eyes, how you see me, I mean. Flattering. As for your ideas, I’m…intrigued.”

“Intrigued?” Theo bit his lip and grinned impishly. “So you aren’t opposed?”

“Opposed to what, exactly? You showed me a lot.” And gave her even more to think about.

Theo chuckled. “Any of it?” His cheeks turned a fetching shade of pink. “Erm, let’s see…anal sex?”

Three months ago, she’d have probably wrinkled her nose, not opposed but just—she wouldn’t have seen the point when there were other more obvious options, but now…now was a different story. Theo had licked her there when going down on her, and he’d traced her pucker, pressed against it. Subtle touches, but pleasurable. She wasn’t going to discredit the potential for more pleasure. “Sure. I mean, I’m not opposed.”

“Really?” Both his brows lifted.

She nodded. “So, you want to”—she swallowed—“bugger me while Draco…”

“Fucks your cunt?” he offered.

Good Godric. “Right.”

He shrugged. “Or the reverse. I’m not picky, but yes.”

Wiping her damp palms off on her thighs, she shifted on the cushion. She wasn’t going to bother asking if that was possible—Theo had pictured it quite clearly, clearly enough that she could see it would work. Oh, she had seen plenty. It was more a matter of whether it appealed. Her experience with buggering was null, but theoretically she could imagine she’d be very full, and that was alluring in and of itself. Not to the mention the intimacy; you couldn’t get much physically closer to two people at once than that. Plus, there had to be an element of sensory overload, so much pleasure coming at you in different ways all at once. She’d seen the sheer bliss splashed across her face in Theo’s imagination. Yes, the idea appealed. It very much appealed, the thread-like pull at her chest and naval drawing tight. Even her fingertips tingled as if her magic really liked the idea. Interesting.

“I want to try it,” she said, punctuating her decision with a firm nod.

Theo gaped at her. “Wait, really?”

“Is it that surprising?” She shrugged. “I mean, I assume there must be some preparation involved. I doubt it would be a bright idea to dive right into that without, I don’t know, building up to it first. But yes, really.”

Theo’s eyes widened. “Obviously. It would be moronic to take you from anal virgin to double penetration pro in the span of one night. Not to mention dangerous.”

Her face flamed, Theo’s words equally as arousing at they were embarrassing. “Okay.”
He cleared his throat and nodded, still looking a little stunned. He wasn’t the only one; she had not imagined talking about this when she’d woken up this morning. Then again, she hadn’t expected anything that had happened today. She gnawed on the edge of her lip. Theo had done an excellent job of distracting her.

How long had Draco been gone? An hour? Was Lucius behaving? Were they talking? Sitting quietly and glaring at one another across the dining table? She desperately hoped things were going well…or at least not terribly.

“How long had Draco been gone? An hour? Was Lucius behaving? Were they talking? Sitting quietly and glaring at one another across the dining table? She desperately hoped things were going well…or at least not terribly.”

“Hermione.” Theo waved his hand. “Where’d you go?”

She sighed and shook her head. “Sorry. I was just thinking you looked surprised and then I got to thinking about how this whole day was surprising which made me think about how Draco’s doing.”

Theo frowned. “He’ll be okay. If he’s not now, he will be.”

“Right.” She nodded briskly.

“I mean, I’m sure telling him you’re game for a good buggering will lift his spirits,” Theo joked.

She rolled her eyes.

“She’s going to be fine.” Theo reached out, resting his hand over hers. “I promise.”

I know.” Worrying would do her no good. All it would do is work her into a frazzled tizzy when she needed to keep cool if and when Draco needed her, her and Theo both. Theo was right. She clung to his promise and took a deep breath in, holding the air until her lungs burned before expelling it swiftly. “Anyway, I like your second idea, too.”

Theo smiled. “Yeah?”

“But what were you doing with your wand?” she asked.

“I can show you?” He reached into his pocket and withdrew his wand. “Turn your hand over, palm up.”

She did as bade, watching eagerly as Theo oscillated his wand quickly from side to side and murmured, “Vibrare.”

Holy shite. The vibration intensified, her skin tingling. Gods, she could feel the buzz all the way through her body, down even into her toes. No wonder she was bloody writhing in his mind’s eye. “Oh.”

“The buzzing stopped. “You like it?”

“Vibrare terminus.”

Ollivander’s needed a new slogan—Wands are a witch’s best friend. “Mhmm.”

Theo laughed and set his wand aside before leaning back and crossing his left ankle over his right knee. “I thought you might.”
“You could’ve showed me that sooner, you know.” She cut her eyes in jest. “Might’ve made waiting a little easier had I know I could turn my wand into a vibrator.”

“My sincerest apologies.” His tongue darted out, wetting the swell of his bottom lip. “You want me to make it up to you?”

She nodded.

“How?”

She took a moment, staring off into the dying embers of the fireplace at her side. So many options existed, it was choosing one that posed a problem. Well…there was one idea that stood out above the rest. “Okay.”

“Okay?” Theo’s dark brows merged in the center of his forehead.

“Go on. Have a look.” She flourished her fingers beside her head and teased him with his own words, “I’ll make it nice and loud for you.”

Theo stared at her. “You’re sure?”

She was. She wouldn’t have offered otherwise. Her stomach twisted and her heart pounded, yes, but those were just nerves. “I am.”

“All right,” Theo sounded wary, but he reached for his wand, swiping his hand against his pant leg first. Wand poised at the ready, he locked his blue eyes on her, stare unwavering. He rolled his shoulders and took a shuddering breath in. “Legilimens.”

Smooth as butter was right. Theo’s intrusion was gentle, nothing more than a subtle pressure that pulsed inside her skull as he slithered inside her mind. She focused on the fantasy, tried to project it loudly to help him the best she could.

In her head, she was naked and bound just as in Theo’s fantasy, but there was also a blindfold wrapped around her eyes, obscuring her vision. Totally at Theo’s mercy, she panted as he fucked her roughly, hips snapping. His forehead rested over her shoulder as he whispered filthy praises in her ear. Some were things he’d said before, others new, like how much he loved her. The scene was salacious with just a dash of secret sweetness, exactly like Theo.

He slipped from her mind with the same ease with which he’d entered. He blinked and dropped his wand to his side, a smile playing at his lips. “Not going to lie, I like being able to look into your eyes when I fuck you like that, when you get all come drunk and high off my cock, but I’m certainly not opposed.”

She bit her lip and squirmed. All this fantasizing and talking about fantasizing and focusing on it was making her hornier than she’d been in ages. “The blindfold isn’t a requirement. Just an idea.”

“Oh, I’ll do it. Gladly.” He smirked. “Maybe I’ll tie you up and make you wait for a bit. Then you won’t know when I plan to touch you. Or where.” His smirk grew. “Better yet, if Draco’s there, you won’t know which of us is touching you when. A nice element of surprise, hmm? Then, when you’re close, I can take the blindfold off. Best of both worlds.”

She wasn’t breathing, she was panting. He’d taken her fantasy and made it so much better. “I like the way you think.”

Theo lifted his hands, palms up. “What can I say? My depravity is a gift.”
If Theo was depraved, well then, sign her up for a lifetime of wanton wickedness. “You’re not—”

A crack of apparition filled the room as Milly appeared beside the fireplace. She was dressed in an emerald-colored confection today, this one poofy like a ballgown. “Master Draco asked Milly to tell Mister Theo and Miss Hermione Granger that he has returned to his room.”

“Is he okay?” she asked, scrambling out of the chair.

Milly wrung her hands together and shrugged. “Milly does not wish to lie, but she does not know.”

Theo stood, swiftly pocketing his wand. “Would you mind bringing us to his room? It would be quicker for us.”

The little elf nodded. “Of course. Milly would be happy to.”

She held out her hands. Theo rested his left palm against Hermione’s back and with his right hand, took Milly’s. She followed suit, gripping Milly’s tiny, bony hand in hers. Milly squeezed her fingers back in what she liked to think was solidarity just before everything went tight and the library disappeared from view.
Hi everyone! I updated the tags to remove PWP, as I see how it can be a tad misleading since there's a bit of plot holding this whole thing together.

Again, thank you all so much for reading, leaving kudos, and commenting. Last week was super hectic (I'm on a deadline with other work, eek) but hopefully I'll have more time to focus on fic writing this week. The next chapter is finished and I should have it posted on Tuesday or Wednesday at the latest.

I hope you enjoy! :)

Milly brought them directly to the hall outside Draco’s bedroom. She stepped back and curtsied, her knobby fingers twisting the sumptuous fabric of her dress nervously. “Milly leaves Mister Theo and Miss Hermione Granger here now. There is nothing more Milly can do, Milly is afraid.”


Milly smiled crookedly and with a crack, disappeared into thin air.

“Okay.” She took a deep breath. Did they need a game plan, a strategy? Were they just going to go in there, wands blazing? Metaphorically, of course. They weren’t actually going to draw their wands. Unless Draco needed them to? For what purpose, she had no idea. Better to prepare for anything. “What do we do?”

Theo stared at her dully. “You’re asking me? Merlin, Hermione, I was waiting for you to come up with something.”

“Well, this time I don’t know.” He threw up his hands. “Do you have even the slightest clue where his head is right now? Because I don’t.”

He was right. How they proceeded hinged on Draco’s state. They needed to suss out what he needed before they could deliver it.

She nodded. “You’re right. We need to figure out what he’s feeling and thinking and then go from there.”

Theo’s shoulders drooped, his voice dropping to match the slump of his posture. “I hate this, Hermione. I hate not knowing what to do for him.”
Helpless. Theo hated feeling helpless.

Swallowing hard, she rested her hand on his bicep, squeezing gently. “We just need to be there for him, okay? At the end of the day, if that’s all we can do, it’s something.”

And something would always be better than nothing.

The bedroom door swung open, Draco’s silhouetted form standing in the doorway. He rested his hand on the frame and cocked a brow. “Are you two finished, or would you like to continue standing in the hall chatting about how best to handle me? No rush, really, I can wait.”

She studied him closely. His gray eyes were rimmed red from this morning, but it didn’t look like he’d shed any fresh tears. His skin was smooth, pale, not splotchy, nor was his nose rubbed raw. He looked okay, but looks could be misleading, especially for Draco who was quite adept at hiding his emotions.

“We’re finished.” Theo stepped forward and set his hand on Draco’s shoulder, fingers curling around the back of his neck. He dipped his head, staring into Draco’s eyes. “How are you doing?”

Draco rolled his eyes. “You both can quit looking at me like I’m liable to burst into tears at a moment’s notice, okay? Just get inside; conversing in the hall is for the help, honestly.”

Snarky, perhaps more so than he’d been as of late, but not out of character. Defense mechanism or not, Draco’s sass was actually comforting in that it showed he hadn’t been beaten down by the events of the day. Not that she’d tell him that. He’d think she was psychoanalyzing him.

Letting Theo lead the way, she brushed past Draco on her way into the room. Theo collapsed into a wingback chair beside the fireplace. Draco shut the door and joined them, taking a seat next to her on a chaise that was more comfortable than met the eye.

Hands gripping her knees, she once more counted her heart beats, waiting for Draco to speak. She hit seventeen when he cleared his throat.

“He looks awful,” Draco whispered. “He’s down at least two stone, likely more.” Merlin. “And he just sat there, watching me, like he was in a daze or had been imperio’d or something.” He scraped his hand over his face and shook his head. “I know Azkaban isn’t guarded by dementors, not anymore, but you could’ve told me otherwise and I’d believe it.” He sighed. “He was so quiet and…I don’t know, I got angry. He was just staring, face totally expressionless, and it fucking rankled that he was the one who should’ve been the one saying something and yet it was left to me. I—I sort of lost it.”

She shook her head. “Lost it? What do you mean?”

That could mean anything. Merlin, what had Draco done? A terrible what-if scenario flashed through her mind. Had he cursed his father? Was an auror squad on the way to take Draco away? Replace one Malfoy with another inside Azkaban?

“I tore into him. I’ve never done that before, yelled like that at him, not even when I was a child.”

Draco swallowed and shrugged. “One minute I was staring at him and the stupid clock was ticking, ticking, ticking, and the next thing I knew I was standing right in front of him screaming myself hoarse.”

She looked at Theo. He was staring at Draco with wide eyes like he couldn’t believe it. It was a bit difficult to picture; Draco’s anger usually ran cold, his ire frosty and frigid. He was more likely to sneer and give someone the cold shoulder than rage. He wasn’t the hot-tempered sort, the kind to
blow his lid. Then again, one person could only choke down so much, suppress their emotions for so long before their cauldron would bubble over, so to speak.

“What”—she cleared her throat—“What happened? What did he do?” She couldn’t imagine Lucius took too kindly to his son cutting him down to size in his own house.

Draco ran his fingers through his hair. It stuck up briefly before he patted it down into place. “He sat there for a moment, but I could tell he heard me, heard everything I said because he was actually looking at me, not through me. Then he stood up and got right in front of me and lifted his hand and—fuck, I thought he was going to hit me.”

Her breath caught and Theo’s hands curled into fists in his lap.

“He didn’t.” Draco shook his head briskly. “He…” A wet laugh bubbled up from between his lips. “He bloody hugged me.”

Theo leaned forward, brows drawn low over his eyes. “Lucius hugged you. Lucius. He hugged you. Are you certain?”

Draco covered his face with his hands, shoulders shaking. His muffled voice slipped through his fingers. “I know, right? I thought I’d lost my mind, gone totally bonkers. Fuck, I was about to check myself into St. Mungos when”—Draco lifted his head from the cradle of his hands and blinked several times as if still not totally believing what had happened—“he started to cry. My father fucking cried.”

“Get the fuck out.” Theo gaped. “Lucius fucking cried? You’re pulling my leg, Draco.”

It was rather difficult to picture, the ever stoic elder Malfoy clutching his son in an embrace and tearing up. Then again, he was human just like anyone else. Maybe he was just as adept at burying his feelings as Draco was. Maybe both Malfoys had had enough and reached their breaking points in tandem.

“I’m not.” Draco plucked at his lower lip. His eyes went briefly glassy but he blinked quickly and shook his head. When he spoke again, his voice was a rough whisper. “He made a mess all over my shoulder and then he”—Draco swallowed—“he told me he loves me.”

Calling her feelings toward Lucius Malfoy complicated was putting it lightly. His misdeeds had been more grievous than Draco’s. She’d forgiven Narcissa, but what exactly had Narcissa really done wrong? Love her husband despite his flaws, numerous though they were? Maybe it was trickier because Lucius had worn a mask and mark, had actually carried out violence in Voldemort’s name. How much violence she wasn’t sure; she’d witnessed him fight, Merlin, he’d fought her friends in the Ministry. He’d have likely fought her had Dolohov’s curse not put her out of commission. To the best of her knowledge, Lucius hadn’t killed anyone, but what did she truly know? Maybe he had killed, killed Muggles even, or maybe just tortured a few? Just tortured, Gods. Talk about a staggeringly low bar.

The thought made her squirm, made the space between her shoulders blades itch, her skin crawling.

On the other hand, what Lucius had done, he’d done to protect his family, at least in the end. Not at first, no, he’d joined Voldemort willingly, asked for his Dark Mark, but how much of his choice was influenced by his father, Abraxas? Yes, at some point, generational brainwashing became a weak excuse for being a bigot, but then again, he’d broken the cycle…well, Draco had, but Lucius
had clearly put his loyalty to his family above his loyalty to Voldemort and the Pureblood principles with which he’d been raised. He could’ve said to hell with his son during that final battle, fought alongside the other Death Eaters, but he hadn’t. And he hadn’t run, hadn’t fled the country like so many others. Instead, he’d faced his fate, his sentencing, done his time in Azkaban.

Lucius was not a courageous man, no, and his compass might not have pointed due north, but she believed he loved his family, even if he didn’t always show it, or show it demonstratively.

Shades of gray, so many shades of gray. What it truly came down to was whether Draco wanted a relationship with his father. If he did, she wouldn’t add to his strain, his burden. She wouldn’t make him choose, Gods no, nor would she campaign against the man. Of course, her feelings toward Lucius were hers and hers alone, but she could keep them to herself if need be. Or maybe she’d forgive him, who knew? She’d have to talk to the man, actually have a conversation with him before she could know for sure.

“That’s…” What was she supposed to say? Theo looked speechless, lips parted in apparent shock and Draco looked equally as dumbstruck, lost in thought. “Good?”

Draco shrugged. “I can’t remember the last time he told me that, so it’s something I need to process.”

He couldn’t remember the last time his father had told him he loved him? Good grief, she’d tell him twice as often. He deserved that, deserved to hear it and hear it frequently. Just like Theo.

“Do you forgive him?” Theo asked, voice low, sparking with curiosity.

Draco sighed. “I don’t know. He didn’t actually apologize for anything, but that’s not really the sticking point for forgiveness, is it?”

Sometimes it was, other times it was change, better behavior. And sometimes it just was, forgiveness given for no reason other than that the alternative was too exhausting.

She bit her lip. “Do you want to forgive him?”

Draco’s Adam’s apple bobbed. “I think I do, yes.” He turned, staring at her imploringly.

She shook her head before he could speak. “I’m not judging you, Draco.”

“Part of me still hates him, what he did.” He took a tremulous breath in. “The rest of me—I love him even though I hate him. Or maybe I just want to hate him. I don’t know.”

Lucius was officially on house arrest, condemned to the Manor for the next three years.

Three years had to be more than long enough for Draco to figure out exactly how he felt. For all their sakes, she hoped the resolution would happen sooner. Much sooner.

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“I don’t know if this is a good idea,” she muttered, smoothing down the skirt of her robes.

She’d Floo’d back to Grimmauld and picked up her belongings, returning to the Manor at Draco’s behest. Apparently, Narcissa wanted her to stay for dinner—every evening until they returned to Hogwarts, Narcissa insisted—and Lucius…well, apparently he wanted to speak with her, too. Brilliant.
“Oh, it’s probably a terrible idea,” Theo said brightly. He set his hands on her waist and pulled her snug against his chest as they looked at their reflections in the mirror before them. “But Narcissa gets what Narcissa wants.”

A theme, a motto. Would Hermione get what she wanted? Merlin, what was she saying? She already had. Everything else was cake. Well…as long as her boys were happy. *Then* everything else was cake.

Buoyed, she smiled at Theo in the mirror. “Heaven forbid we disappoint her.”

“You joke, but she can be scary,” Theo warned. “Terrifying in truth. You just haven’t seen it yet. But one day you will. Probably when Narcissa starts planning our wedding, whenever that may be. I hope you don’t fancy a June wedding by the way. She finds them pedestrian.”

“I find it hard to believe any event Narcissa Malfoy has a hand in planning could be pedestrian. Is that word even in her vocabulary?”

She wasn’t about to argue over whether Narcissa could be scary. She already knew she could be, knew it well. And though she’d joked, disappointing the woman was not something she was keen on. The thought of it put a strange knot in her stomach, the same she got when she thought about letting down Professor McGonagall.

Theo’s nose wrinkled. “It’s on her list of unsavory traits and characteristics. Right up there with vulgar and cheap.” He paused. “Eh, she can excuse vulgarity as long as there’s wit to properly balance it out.”

“Come now, Theo, we both know my mother can excuse bawdiness. Vulgarity is something else entirely.” Draco stepped into the room, adjusting his cufflinks. “There’s little she hates more than a lack of sophistication from those who know better.”

Theo snapped his fingers. “Flamboyancy. She loathes that, too.”

Draco shrugged. “Two sides of the same coin. Either way, it’s a lack of refinement. If you have something, you need not flaunt it.” He shook his wrists, the sleeves of his crisp white button-down settling into place. “What brought this up?”

“Theo was just telling me your mother always gets her way and can be quite daunting when vexed. He said I’d find out eventually. She apparently finds June weddings distasteful,” she said.

“That’s because June weddings *are* distasteful. You’ve got eleven other months to work with; at the very least they’re uninspired.” Draco winced. “You don’t fancy a June wedding, do you?”

She hadn’t really thought about it. “No?”

Draco shut his eyes and sighed in obvious relief. “Oh, good.”

He left the room, fingers straightening his collar.

Theo snorted. “Okay, Narcissa *and* Draco find June weddings pedestrian. I’d make a comment about apples not falling far from the tree, but I worry that’s a little too on the nose for this day.”

“True.” She nodded. “Best not let Draco hear you say that. He’ll get the wrong idea about his father and find it…”

“Prophetic?” Theo offered.
She took one last look in the mirror. Her lavender dress fit her like a glove, was one of her favorites, truly. Fingers crossed the evening went well, or else she’d forever think of this night when she looked at the dress. If it went too poorly, she’d have to donate it. “Yes, so let’s just—let’s not, okay?”

To say they were all on pins and needles was putting it lightly. She and Theo were both worried for Draco, but there was a healthy dose of trepidation spiking her anxiety that was distinct from her worry for Draco’s emotional state, and it had everything to do with her own meeting with Lucius.

“Ready?” Theo asked, holding out his arm.

She tuck her fingers into the crook of his elbow. “As I’ll ever be.”

Draco was waiting by the door to the hall, slouched against the frame, his posture a clever red herring meant to fool them into thinking he was fine. His steely gaze and the occasional twitch in his jaw gave him away.

“It’s just dinner,” she said, assuring herself as much as them.

Theo nodded. “Right. Dinner. We’ll have some wine, enjoy Milly’s cooking, have a little chat. What’s the worst that could happen?”

They all winced at the same time.

“Damn it. Forget I said that.” Theo shook his head.

Hard to forget when her brain had been spinning worst-case scenarios since she’d returned to the manor.

According to Narcissa and supported by Draco’s own meeting with his father, Lucius seemed dedicated to—change? Bettering himself? Okay, fair, but he was still Lucius sodding Malfoy. He wasn’t going to go from arsehole to fluffy puppy overnight. Maybe his…softening? Was that what it was? Had been in the works for longer than his stint in Azkaban. Having a mad man take over your ancestral home, degrade you on the daily, threaten your wife, and put your son up to horrific and futile tasks in hopes that he’d fail—well, that had to change a man. It could’ve gone the other way, could’ve hardened him and killed the humanity in him, but apparently it made Lucius want to be a better father, a better husband.

But he was still Lucius Malfoy. He might want to be a better husband and father, but he hadn’t had a personality transplant. Maybe he didn’t want her dead or maimed or chained up in someone’s dungeon or licking someone’s boots or her wand snapped—she shivered; okay, enough of *that*—but that didn’t mean he wanted her in his house, at his dinner table, dating his son, as a prospective member of his family, maybe mother to his future grandchildren. Narcissa seemed convinced otherwise, but maybe this was all part of a long con. Put her ease and then slowly drive her out of her mind by critiquing her until she crumpled. Ugh, she’d believe Lucius was okay with her relationship with Draco when she saw it.

Not that she had to wait much longer to figure out exactly what the man would be like, be like to *her*. The walk from the dining room to Draco’s quarters had seemed lengthy last night, when Theo had carried her. Now, it was much too brief. It felt like they had just left Draco’s bedroom and now they were standing in front of the double doors to the dining room.

“Let’s get this over with,” Draco grumbled, shoulders rolling back as his whole spine went rigid and straight, his chin lifting and face blanking in a picture of bored affectation.
She frowned. He was much too good at that, eerily adept at locking down his emotions. So good that it put a discomfited pit in her stomach, her chest tightening at his reserve.

Theo squeezed the fingers locked around the crook of his arm and smiled brightly, too brightly. “Showtime.”

Showtime, indeed. Standing just outside the entrance to the dining room, she had the strange sensation of biding time in the wings of a stage waiting for the curtain to rise. Draco was to play the cool, reserved one of the three and Theo clearly had decided to go the route of cheerful joker. Problem was, in this show of theirs, what was her role to be?

It was too late to ponder over her inability to act, to be much of anything but herself. Draco strode off into the dining room and Theo tugged her along and there was no need to consider what it would be like setting eyes on Lucius because there he was, in the flesh, not that there was very much flesh because Draco had been right.

Dressing impeccably, Lucius Malfoy sat at the head of the table across from Narcissa, also flawless in appearance. His robes were gray, several shades darker than his eyes, and they were tailored to perfection. Charmed to perfection, rather, because there was no way he owned anything that could fit him that well after losing as much weight as he had. Who knew what other charms had been employed to make him look presentable, because his face, while lean, showed little wear and tear, certainly none of the gaunt exhaustion one might expect after several months spent in prison, and his hair was shiny and bright, long as ever and tied back at the nape of his neck.

In short, Lucius looked thin, but normal except—

His eyes. Those silver eyes of his, so much like Draco’s, no longer resembled steel, nor did they possess the flashing volatility of mercury, but rather something more…reflective, vulnerable. When he met her stare, his gaze went guarded, but not she’d gotten a decent look, enough to know Azkaban had changed him, and not just physically.

Narcissa sat up straighter in her seat and smiled softly. “Perfect timing. Lucius and I were just discussing how pleased we were that the three of you would be joining us this evening.”

When Draco said nothing, Theo cleared his throat. “Any time spent in your company is time well spent, Narcissa.”

Draco and Lucius both rolled their eyes, a move that made them both look frighteningly alike. “Theodore,” Lucius drawled. “Delightful to see you as always.”

Theo grinned. “Once more with feeling, Lucius.”

She covered her mouth and coughed into her fist. Never had she ever heard anyone speak to Lucius like that. Such a display of impertinence by anyone else and they’d have probably been hexed six ways to Sunday, but all Lucius did in response to Theo’s cheek was lift one lazy brow before his gaze darted over to—oh Gods. Her. Stomach clenching as he stared unflinchingly, she fought against the urge to stand up a little straighter as she stared right back.

His stare didn’t break, not even as he rose from his chair gracefully. He kept his eyes locked on her as he approached, his gaze only flickering to the side when Draco took a step closer, buffering her slightly.

“Theodore,” Lucius drawled. “Delightful to see you as always.”

Theo grinned. “Once more with feeling, Lucius.”

“Miss Granger.” Lucius extended a hand to—bloody hell. He wanted to shake her hand? Her hand. Hermione Granger, friend of Harry Potter, Gryffindor, Muggleborn. The moment was so
unbelievably surreal that she stood there, gaping for a moment, staring between his outstretched hand and his face until his mouth twitched, a barely perceptible show of discomfort at her leaving him hanging.

Willing her arm not to tremble, she stuck out her hand, allowing him to clasp it lightly in his cool, surprisingly soft palm. Thank Merlin he didn’t do something truly outrageous and kiss her fingers. Who knew what she might’ve done? Who knew what Draco might’ve done? Another vision of the aurors dragging Draco away flashed through her mind.

“Welcome to our home.” He released her and nodded, bowing slightly at the waist, but never one dropping his eyes. “I trust you’ve found it to your liking?”

What sort of question was that and what did he mean by it? Slytherins, the lot of them. She could handle her Slytherins, but the rest could keep their doublespeak and riddles and say what they bloody well meant.

“I find that I’m fonder upon my second visit,” she said.

At her side, Draco flinched. Making him uneasy wasn’t her intention, not at all, but if Lucius thought the past and his part in it could be swept under the rug with a few niceties, he was sorely mistaken.

Lucius took a deep breath and maintained his stare. “Yes. Your first visit did set a rather low bar, I’d imagine.”

Narcissa gasped and both Draco and Theo went dreadfully still, Theo’s arm turning to stone beneath her fingers.

The moment was bizarre, so bizarre all she could do was laugh. “You could say that.”

Lucius stepped back, smoothly pulling a chair out from the table and gesturing to the seat with a wave of his hand. “Please, have a seat.”

Releasing Theo’s elbow, she stepped toward the table and rounded the chair, perching carefully against the edge of the seat. Lucius tucked her chair in and returned to his seat across the table from his wife, leaving Draco and Theo floundering. She glanced over her shoulder. They were staring at each other, then the chair at her side separating her from Lucius, and then back at each other. Theo pulled a face, lips pursing, and crossed the room to the opposite side of the table. Draco slid smoothly into the seat beside her, apparently having won whatever silent contest they’d just had.

A bottle of wine was already on the table. Another bottle of the Domaine Faiveley from the night before, in fact. Draco reached for the bottle and shot her a look, brow arched. She nodded and he filled her glass and then his before leaning forward and passing the bottle across the table to Theo who polished it off. While she had no intention of indulging to the extent she had the night before, going through this dinner without something to take the edge off sounded awful.

A crack filled the air and suddenly their plates were in front of them, full of salmon and asparagus and roasted potatoes. She set her napkin in her lap and waited for someone else to begin before she lifted her fork.

She didn’t have to wait for long.

Lucius dug into his food like a man possessed. A polite man possessed, granted, his table manners impeccable as ever, but he ate with zeal as if he hadn’t had a decent meal in years. Tearing her eyes
away so he wouldn't catch her staring, she tucked into her own food.

A minute passed before Narcissa spoke, gaze locked on Lucius, staring at him with a slightly watery look in her eyes as if he might vanish. “What did you think of the library, Hermione?”

She swallowed her bite and washed it down with a sip of wine. “It was amazing. I’ve never seen such a large personal collection.”

“Yes. It is rather impressive. Did anything in particular catch your eye?” Narcissa asked, finally tearing her eyes away from her husband.

Her cheeks prickled with heat. Yes, but sex magic wasn’t polite dinner conversation. “Erm, everything?”

Across the table, Theo snorted.

Narcissa laughed softly and dabbed at the corner of her mouth with her napkin. “Good thing you can explore the library whenever you’d like. Isn’t that right, Lucius?”

He froze with his fork halfway to his mouth. “Indeed.”

Indeed. One word and he returned to his food, the implication that she’d be around for an indeterminate amount of time ignored entirely.

The rest of dinner was a quiet affair, the soft trill of utensils clanking against china the only sound. At least until Lucius finished his food, set his fork down, and cleared his throat. “Miss Granger, if I could have a word?”

Theo froze, potato slipping off his fork and landing on his plate with splat. She turned to Draco who was clenching his fork and his jaw, his brows knitted into one pale furrow.

“Yes?” She nearly winced, her intention not for her answer to slip out as a question. “I mean, here? Now?”

The edge of Lucius’ mouth twitched. “Draco looks as if he’d curse me if I suggested we speak privately, and as I have no wand to defend myself, yes, here would be best.”

“Might we refrain from talk of curses at the dinner table?” Narcissa pursed her lips, brows arching.

Lucius held his hands up in supplication. “As you wish.”

Theo coughed into his fist, muffling what he said. “Whipped.”

Narcissa narrowed her eyes and Theo jerked in his seat, hand flying to his bum. ‘Ow. Merlin’s ballsack that fucking stung. Curses are off limits but jinxes are fair game? Rather hypocritical of you, Narcissa.”

“Language.” Narcissa reminded, face blank save for a twitch at the corner of her mouth.

Theo huffed. “I had a tickle in my throat. I didn’t realize that was a crime.”

“It’s not, but your terrible inability to lie with a straight face might as well be a crime, Theodore. It’s certainly painful to watch. If you’re going to lie, at least try harder, dear,” Narcissa said.

Lucius cleared his throat. “Miss Granger?”
Right, talking. She nodded. “All right.”

Here it was, the moment of truth. Her pulse pounded in her throat, her stomach churning.

He stared directly at her as he spoke, “I could regale you with a laundry list of my misdeeds, and even if I abbreviated it to my most grievous transgressions, we would be here all night. You and I both know I am no saint, Miss Granger. I’ve committed a number of unspeakable offenses, but none worse than the wrongdoings I can attest to, no matter how painful I find them to claim.” He paused, taking a deep, fortifying breath. “I’ve been a deplorable father and a rather lackluster husband particularly in the last few years. My choices put my family in danger, and that I will never forgive myself for as my family means everything to me.

“I could attempt to explain myself. I could tell you I was confused, that my allegiance to the Dark Lord was borne of some misunderstanding, a youthful transgression, a desire to make my own father proud, and perhaps to an extent it was, but mostly I knew exactly what I was doing. Even now, I value tradition and heritage and I am wary of the influence of Muggles on our society.”

Draco’s hands gripped the edge of the table, his knuckles turning white. Lucius reached for his wine and took a healthy swallow. She’d have done the same except she couldn’t move, could scarcely breathe and let his words pour over her.

“However, my actions nearly cost my son his life. Undoubtedly, my actions, though indirect, played a hand in the loss of many lives, which, believe it or not, was never my intention, but rather segregation of our society and protection of our values, was. However, intentions mean little in the face of such suffering. I regret a number of my choices, and moreover, I am sorry for how those choices have affected you over the years, Miss Granger.”

She blinked. “Me?”

Lucius nodded. “You. Along with your peers of course, though I am not speaking to them at the moment, I am speaking to you and so it is my intention to personalize this apology. You sacrificed the majority of your adolescence to fight a war that should never have been fought in the first place. I could delve into the specifics, but again, we would be here all night, and quite frankly, I’d like to save my breath as my words can only do so much. I’m certain the veracity, not to mention sincerity, of my apology is questionable to you.”

How astute of him. She nodded.

“As my wife has implied, your presence in this house and in my son’s life, therefore my life, is apparently not transient and so I’d rather make it my aim to prove my sincerity than wax poetic.” Lucius cocked his head. “I do believe, however, I owe you my thanks.”

Thanks? “For what?”

His brows rose. “I won’t lie and say I wasn’t shocked when Narcissa shared with me the news of your relationship with Draco.” Lucius chuckled beneath his breath. “I knew my son was fond of you, but I had no idea his affections were returned. Suffice it to say, I’m surprised you’ve found it in yourself to forgive Draco for parroting me over the years, but I won’t say I’m displeased. Draco is happy and for your part in that, I thank you.”

Her head was swimming. What was she supposed to say to that, to any of it? In all honesty, she didn’t want a laundry list of his misdeeds, didn’t want to hear him apologize. She was tired of apologies, and hearing words of contrition from Lucius made her uncomfortable. They were so disparate from the regal, stoic man she’d glimpsed over the years that it made her squirm. But she
needed something more from him, more than his appreciation that she made Draco happy.

“While I appreciate your candor and agree that protracted apologies are unnecessary, I will admit to finding it rather difficult to believe you’re simply okay with this, with me.” She reached for her glass of wine, not to sip, but rather to play with the stem, needing something to hold on to. “I’m having trouble reconciling your…acceptance with your admitted wariness of Muggles and no doubt Muggleborns, of which I need not remind you I am.”

Lucius twisted his signet ring on his finger. An idle gesture or a nervous habit? “I am wary of Muggles and Muggleborns, not because of blood purity as many are concerned, but rather because of the threat they pose to our society and the preservation of our traditions. Some of the oldest, arguably most beautiful magics are deemed dark simply for lack of understanding. Consider blood magic, for instance. Does Hogwarts even teach it? Of course not, and so what many fail to understand then, is that blood can ward, can create tokens and talismans, can protect, can do far more good than not. All anyone thinks of is conjurations and curses. It is difficult to instill a certain appreciation if not reverence for traditions when children are inducted into this world at the age of eleven. Witches and wizards believe they may cherry pick, taking the magics and traditions they like, and forgetting the rest.

“Tell me, Miss Granger”—Lucius dipped his chin in the direction of Draco and then Theo—“is a relationship such as yours accepted in Muggle society? No? Were you aware of its acceptance in our world, or was that something Draco or Theo had to teach you? Had you ever even heard the phrase coetus fidelium? Did you know anything of courtship rituals? Bonds? No? Some things cannot be found in your books, Miss Granger.”

She clenched her jaw, face prickling with heat. He could dial down the condescension. “Perhaps if such knowledge was not so staunchly guarded, ignorance wouldn’t be an issue amongst Muggleborns. Furthermore, it seems your issue is with the system that prevents an induction into society until the age of eleven, not the Muggleborns themselves, Mr. Malfoy.”

Lucius arched a brow. “Perhaps.”

Perhaps? Merlin, the man was infuriating. At least Narcissa was doing something, had actual plans to rectify the issue of ignorance, that of both Purebloods and Muggleborns alike, with the orphanage and primary school they’d discussed.

“To answer your questions as to whether I have qualms about your relationship with my son or your presence in my home, the answer is no. Regardless of your parentage, you’ve proven yourself not only bright but also capable of making my son happy, an endeavor I myself have failed in.”

She took a sip of wine to cool her temper. Lucius might’ve stomached Draco’s fit of rage, but there was no way he’d allow her the same privilege. “And if I were to become a more…permanent fixture?”

Draco shifted in his seat, sitting up straighter.

Lucius took a moment, folding his linen napkin in half twice, setting it beside his plate. “I am not so staunchly opposed to Muggles that I can’t appreciate what they can offer us. Their portraiture might not move, but the rest of their art has led me to believe the human condition is surprisingly universal, Muggle and magical alike. I confess I’m rather fond of their theatre. Did you know the Ancient Greeks had a system of delineating their plays into comedy and tragedy? A fine line at times, and of course there were exceptions but are you aware of the point of distinction between the two?”
“Yes.” It was the same with Shakespeare. “Tragedies ended with death and comedies with—with a wedding.”

Technically Greek comedies had more to do with phallic symbols than marriage, but that was beside the point...hopefully.

“Indeed. I don’t know about you, but I for one have witnessed enough tragedy in this lifetime.” Lucius stood. “If you’ll excuse, I find myself rather weary. Good night, Miss Granger, Theodore.”

He met Draco’s eyes across the table and nodded before turning to Narcissa and smiling, just the barest curl of his lips, but the softness in his eyes spoke of unfathomable affection.

Maybe it wasn’t a ringing endorsement, but it was Lucius Malfoy, and for him, it had been downright warm. She’d take it.
A/N: So sorry for the delay in updating! Life, you know? But I'm posting two chapters to hopefully make up for my tardiness :)

I hope you enjoy!

Back in Draco’s room, she relaxed, breathing deeply for the first time all evening.

At her side, Theo cracked his neck and rolled his shoulders. Apparently she wasn’t the only one feeling a little tense after the day’s events.

She cleared her throat. “That was…”

“Strange?” Theo suggested. His dark brows rose and fell in time with his sigh.

“I was going to say perplexing,” she said. “But I suppose strange works, too.”

Her mind was whirling. Lucius had certainly had one thing right—it was going to take more than a few words, even good ones, for her to believe him, let alone endear him to her.

Dinner had been an effective first step in moving forward, but it had been only that, one step. The journey to redemption couldn’t happen overnight and it would require more than an apology, even if that alone had been surprising. Part of her had been shocked that his tongue hadn’t knotted up like the aftermath of a tongue-tying curse when he’d forced out the words I am sorry, and she wasn’t the only one left reeling. Theo still looked dumbstruck, like he’d watched a bowtruckle prance across the dining room table and do a jig. She certainly knew the feeling.

“I’m going to take a shower,” Draco muttered, already removing his cufflinks and unbuttoning his sleeves. “And then I think I’ll head to bed.”

Draco’s dark mood was back. Circe only knew what was going through his mind in light of the evening’s revelations. In apologizing to her, Lucius had slipped in several apologies, at least words of remorse, in regard to what he’d put Draco through, and he’d tangentially admitted he’d been wrong in aligning himself with Voldemort. It was a lot to process.

But that didn’t mean Draco needed to fall back on old habits of bitter introspection.

She bit the inside of her cheek and stepped toward him, reaching for the buttons at his neck. “Or we could take a bath.”

As much as she encouraged Draco to talk and share his feelings, they’d talked enough for one day. Maybe what he needed, what they all needed, was a little distraction. Talking could wait until morning.

Theo chuckled and molded himself at her back, palms resting on her hips. “I like that idea.”

Draco didn’t say anything, so she glanced up at him through her lashes. He was staring down,
“Feeling dirty, Granger?”

Not until he said that, no. Dinner and Lucius’ words hadn’t exactly—she shuddered—put her in the mood. But the look in Draco’s eyes and the warmth of Theo’s hands soaking through her dress provided a good start to getting her there.

“While you were gone, I showed Draco the books you picked out.” Theo’s breath was hot against her ear. “Didn’t I, Draco?”

Draco hummed and reached out, brushing a curl away from her forehead. “He did. Theo also told me about what he showed you.”

Showed her—oh. *Showed* her. She squirmed on her feet, toes curling in her flats. “Did he tell you what I showed him?”

Draco bit the full swell of his lower lip, eyes darkening. “I’m in agreement with Theo that I’m rather fond of looking into your eyes when you come undone, but as long as I can hear all those perfect sounds you make, I’m willing.”

“I don’t think blindfolds and bathtubs go together.” Her breath caught when Draco reached out, fingertips dancing along the exposed, thin skin covering her collarbone.

Theo laughed and pressed himself closer. He wasn’t hard, not all the way, but she could feel the slight swelling of him against her lower back. “Another time. We can save the charms for later. Right now I want to watch Draco fuck you until you can’t feel your legs.”

Draco’s lids dropped to half-mast. “You want that, Granger?”

Did either of them seriously expect her to say *no*? She nodded.

Theo tugged on her hair. Her eyes crossed as tingles radiated along her scalp and down her spine. “Draco asked you a question, love.”

“Yes. Please.” A few rumbled words and a tug of her curls and she’d gone from not really in the mood to dizzy with arousal.

“Good girl.” Theo nipped her ear, making her shiver.

Somewhere along the way she’d stopped undoing Draco’s button, instead gripping the two halves of his half-opened shirt. “What about you, Theo?”

Theo nosed at her neck, lips following the trail, soft and damp. “What about me?”

She licked her lips. “If Draco’s to shag me until I can’t feel my legs, what are you going to do?”

He and Draco both chuckled. “I’m sure I’ll find some way to occupy myself.”

That sounded equally as intriguing as it did promising, but she didn’t have much of a chance to ponder it. Draco grabbed her around the bum, lifting and drawing her against him. She wrapped her legs around his waist and squeezed, burying her face in his neck and clinging to him as he backed up and carried her into the bathroom.

His skin was warm and smelled subtly like his aftershave, clean and light. She pressed her lips to the hinge of his jaw and darted out her tongue to taste. Not enough. Trailing her lips up until she reached the lobe of his ear, she sucked it between her lips. His grip on her hips tightened and he
groaned quietly. “Fuck, Granger. Give me a minute. I can’t start the tub with you mauling me.”

“Mauling you?” She laughed. “I didn’t even leave a mark.”

He cut his eyes at her playfully and shifted her in his arms with ease. “I never said I didn’t like it. Let me get the water running and you can mark me all over, how’s that?”

Tempting. Draco’s skin was so fair that it would be easy to leave mouth shaped bruises—her mouth shaped bruises—along the column of his throat. “Hurry.”

Draco reached for the faucet, huffing when he couldn’t reach it. It was too far along the wall, the tub a true monstrosity like he’d promised, to twist without either dropping her or tilting her completely sideways. “Hold on.”

He set her down. Hands-free, he turned the knobs until a steady stream of steaming hot water began to fill the tub. Rather than wait, she reached for the hem of her dress.

“Here. Allow me.” Theo sidled up behind her and slipped his hands beneath her dress. Palms gliding up the bare skin of her thighs, he drew the fabric up her body, carefully pulling it over her head. The lilac-colored chiffon pooled beside them on the floor as his fingers slipped beneath the band of her bra.

“I can undress myself, you know.” The catch on her bra released, her breasts dropping slightly as he slid the straps down her arms. The brush of his fingertips left goosebumps along her skin.

“Where’s the fun in that?” he asked.

Draco had added a subtle fragrance to the water—vanilla?—and the swirling steam filled the room, adding a delicate sweetness to the air.

Theo tucked his fingers under the band of her knickers and drew them down her legs. He patted her on the bum, urging her forward. “Go help Draco get undressed.”

Stepping out of her knickers the rest of the way, she reached for the three buttons holding Draco’s shirt together. In a matter of seconds his shirt hung open, revealing a whole swath of his pale skin, skin she still intended to press her mouth against.

But first, he needed to be naked. Immediately. She flicked the button on his trousers and lowered the zipper. Once the band slacked around his hips, Draco shucked his pants and undershorts, tossing them in a pile beside her dress. His shirt followed, but before she could make good on her plan, he’d once against seized her around the middle, lifting her into his arms as he stepped into the tub and lowered them both with ease.

The water was hot, nearly too hot, as it lapped against her lower back. Between the fragrant, soap-bubble filled water and the feel of Draco’s hands pulling her further in his lap, the stress of the day melted away.

Apparently it was having the same effect on Draco, his cock hard against her bum. His smile was pleased, a touch cocky. “Told you you’d like my bathtub.”

It was nice, mostly because it was so big, big enough to fit the three of them with ease. Gods, they could’ve fit an entire Quidditch team, plus reserves, and have room to spare. “I think I’ll like it even better after you shag me in it.”

Draco’s chest rumbled as he laughed. “Theo’s rubbing off on you.”
“I intend to more than rub off on her.” Theo had stripped down in record time. He climbed in the
tub behind them with a noisy splash that made the water rise around them. Kneeling behind her, he
pressed his cock against her hip, rocking against her.

Draco arched a brow. “As do I.”

She snorted. “I really hope so. As fun that sounds for you, I’d really like to come sometime
tonight.”

Theo laughed and pressed a kiss to the ball of her shoulder. “Remember this moment. We’re going
to get you off so many times you’ll be begging us to stop.”

“I doubt that,” she teased. “I think you might be surprised at much I can handle.”

Draco chuckled. “One day that Gryffindor bravery is going to get you into trouble.”

“One day?” Theo shook his head. “You mean today. Right here, right now.”

She knew better than to taunt him like this, and yet she couldn’t seem to stop goading him. “Am I
supposed to be frightened?”

Theo tangled his hand in her hair and tugged until she arched, back bowing, her chest and bum
sticking out. He dropped his lips to her ear. “That’s the problem with you Gryffindors. All that
blind bravery and not a lick of self-preservation.”

His palm smacked against her arse, the force of the blow dulled by the water. But he’d made his
point, a surprised little gasp slipping out from between her lips.

Draco distracted her from thoughts of Theo’s promise when he slid a wet hand up her torso, thumb
grazing her left nipple. It tightened under his touch and he pinched, first lightly, pressure
increasing until he toed that fine line between pleasure and pain. She rocked against him and
groaned. So good, but she needed friction and it was so bloody hard to come by, the water making
everything slick.

Theo slipped a hand around her hips, fingers grazing the curls between her legs. “Sounds like you
need something.” He nudged the side of her face with his nose. “A kiss, maybe?”

She bit her lip and nodded.

She turned her head to face him, only Theo ducked away, pressing his lips to Draco’s instead.
Draco laughed against his mouth before moaning softly when Theo nipped his lower lip. That little
sound gave Theo access to more, his tongue sweeping inside Draco’s mouth.

The kiss wasn’t even happening to her and it was much too good. Each time Theo bit Draco’s lip,
Draco would pinch her harder, and when Draco sucked on Theo’s tongue, Theo would rock against
her. Privy to this very up close and personal show, she couldn’t just sit there, sit still. There was
patience and then there was insanity. She brought her hand between her legs and circled her clit,
jolting slightly at just how sensitive she already was.

After a moment, Theo pulled back, his and Draco’s eyes immediately dropping to where she was
touching herself beneath the water. The bubbles concealed to a degree, but not enough to hide what
she was doing. Draco smirked. “Having fun there, Granger?”

Between the steam and the heat and the subtle embarrassment, her cheeks prickled. “Do you want
me to stop?”
Theo pinched her nipple, the one Draco wasn’t lazily caressing. “Don’t you dare.”

She bit her lip, eyes fluttering as the tension between her legs built. “Keep kissing.”

Draco reached out and grabbed the back of Theo’s neck, yanking him closer for another kiss full of teeth and tongues and intermittent groans, the sight and sound of which nudged her nearer to the edge. Her fingers sped, circling faster when Theo trailed his kisses down to Draco’s neck where he sucked what looked to be a vicious bruise into his skin, based on the way Draco’s eyes rolled back.

“I—” Her breath caught in her throat, pulse skittering and eyes slamming shut as the tension in her belly snapped, her orgasm plowing into her with a speed and force to rival the Knight Bus.

She was still twitching when Theo gripped her hips and lifted her up on to her knees. Draco’s cock parted her folds, pressing into her as Theo urged her to sink down. Draco hissed through his teeth. “Fuck, are you still going?”

“Mhmm.”

Theo chuckled against the nape of her neck and strummed his fingers over her clit. She jerked against him. Merlin, let her catch her breath. It was unbelievably intense, having Draco inside her so soon, pressing into her at the perfect angle as her muscles rippled with aftershocks. “Give me a minute.”

“Remember what I said?” Theo didn’t let up, stroking her quicker, making her whimper as she dropped her head against Draco’s shoulder. “I wasn’t kidding about making you come so many times you can’t see straight, love.”

She already couldn’t see straight, couldn’t see much of anything with how she had her eyes clenched, bracing herself against the pleasure. It was too much. She muffled a broken groan, teeth biting Draco’s shoulder as Theo nudged her over the edge into another climax.

Draco swore and water splashed around them. His hips rolled against hers, pressing him deeper. “Tell me I can move.”

Her head felt like it was floating as she lifted it and blinked against the soft light of the bathroom. She licked her lips and nodded. “Please.”

Permission granted, Draco bent his knees and thrust up, water sloshing around them each time he rocked into her. He stayed deep, never withdrawing all the way, but what his thrusts lacked in friction he more than made up for in pressure, the head of his cock nudging that place inside her each time he snapped his hips.

Theo’s hands stroked her sides from her bum all the way up to the underside of her breasts. He lifted them, thumbs brushing her nipples, and repeated the circuit all over again, leaving every inch of her electrified and on edge. “Tell me how it feels.”

She dropped her head back against his shoulder and bit back a breathless laugh. “Good.”

“Good?” Theo laughed. “Eloquent. Tell me more.”

She could barely breathe and he wanted her to speak? She shook her head. “I can’t.”

He reached between her legs and pinched her clit. *Fuck.* “I think you can. I think you’re just not trying hard enough.”
She wet her lips, the muscles in her stomach clenching and rolling when Draco sped slightly. “It feels so good. *You* feel so good inside me, Draco.”

Draco grimaced, his expression torn between pleasure and pain. “You’re killing me, Granger.”

Theo’s hands squeezed her bum. Her breath caught when his fingers slipped between her cheeks, brushing lightly against her arse.

“Relax,” he soothed. “I’m just touching you. Are you okay with that?”

She nodded.

“Tell me if you want me to stop, all right?”

Swallowing, she nodded once more.

He traced her rim, a feather-light caress that gradually became firmer. Silly as it was, something about his touching her there felt absurdly naughty. That paired with how bloody good it felt left her panting.

“Just a second,” Theo said, before his touch disappeared. There was the sound of something clicking—a bottle cap, maybe?—and then he was back, right where he’d left off. Only this time he pressed a little harder, the tip of his finger breaching her entrance. She immediately locked up and then took a breath, relaxing slowly. “That’s it. Breathe.”

If Theo’s finger was a stretch, how in the world was she supposed to handle his cock? *Slowly* seemed reasonable, because the feeling wasn’t unpleasant, was a little foreign, but the more she relaxed into it, the better his touch felt. Her presumption that she’d feel full was spot on.

Draco groaned. “Sweet fucking Salazar, I can feel what you’re doing, Theo.”

Theo chuckled darkly and pressed his finger a little deeper. “You like that?”

Was he asking her or Draco? No matter. They both nodded.

“Are you close?” Draco asked. His face was flushed pink, the hair around his forehead and neck curling slightly from the dampness, and his eyes were bright.

She gasped when Theo withdrew his finger, only to press back in. “Very.”

Draco’s throat bobbed, his lashes fluttering. He looked as if he was barely hanging on by a thread, his hands tightening around her hips. “Touch yourself, please.”

She could do that. Fingers resting on either side of her swollen clit, she rubbed herself gently, needing very little stimulation to shove herself over the edge. Her vision darkened and everything inside her clenched, from her chest all the way down to her toes.

“*Fuck,*” Draco shouted, thrusts stuttering and eyes falling shut as he came.

It took her several minutes to recover from that one, but luckily Theo was kind and gave her the time to recuperate. He withdrew his finger and wrapped his arms around her waist, snuggling up behind her with his chin resting over her shoulder.

When she opened her eyes, Draco was watching her from beneath heavy lids, his lips red from kissing and curved in a lazy smile that made her chest clench. She pressed her mouth to his in a languid kiss that made her toes curl and her stomach flip.
His throat bobbed when she pulled back, and his lashes fluttered against his cheeks. “I love you.”

Her eyes went blurry for a moment and it had nothing to do with the steam hanging in the air. “I love you, too, Draco.”

Today might’ve been trying, leaving each of them emotionally worn down, but they were going to be fine. More than fine, if she had her way.

Theo kissed her neck and hummed. “And I love you both, but if I don’t come soon I think my cock is going to explode.”

Draco snorted. “Isn’t that the point?”

“Shut up, I have no blood in my brain, all right? It’s all in my cock.” Theo’s lower lip jutted out pathetically. “Have mercy on me, Hermione.”

She laughed. “Begging now, are we? My, my, have the tables have turned.”

Theo growled playfully. “Okay, now you’re in for it, witch.”

He grabbed her by the hips, Draco’s softening cock slipping from her as Theo hauled over into his lap. He shifted until he was beside Draco, up against the edge of the tub, with her back pressed against his chest. One of his arms was snug around her waist, and with the other he guided his cock through her folds and into her depths. Seated fully inside her, he grunted softly. “You feel amazing. Swollen and soaked for me.”

She bit the inside of her cheek and whimpered. Gods, they’d never done this, gone from her shagging Draco to Theo. She was probably soaked because she was dripping Draco’s come. Godric grief, that was enough to make her dizzy, her face on fire.

Theo must’ve sensed something in her stillness, because he tipped her head back with one hand, tilting her face to the side so he could look at her. “What is it?”

She shook her head.

Theo’s eyes scanned her face, gaze dropping to where her flush bled down on to the tops of her breasts. “Well, something has you flustered. It would be a lot easier if you just told me. I don’t know if you’ll like my methods of getting you to speak.”

Better to get it over with and just say it. She took a deep breath. “I’m—oh Gods, I’m dripping.”

Theo arched a brow. “Good?”

She huffed, meeting Draco’s eye. He was grinning, almost on the verge of laughing. She rolled her eyes. “Never mind.”

“I think she means she’s full of my come,” Draco said, sounding inordinately pleased as he pressed off the wall of the tub and shifted to kneel in front of her.

“Oh.” Theo chuckled. “I know that. And after we’re through, you’ll be full of mine, too.”

She buried her face in her hands. “Oh my Gods.”

Somehow that was as exciting as it was mortifying, her brain firing off different signals that somehow led to the same result—an absurd level of arousal that left her nearly shaking.
Draco pried her hands away from her face. His lips were still curved in a grin. “Theo just had his finger up your arse and yet talking about come is what makes you blush like a virgin?”

“Stop.” She sighed. They wanted to have this little chat now. Hadn’t Theo just been complaining about his cock being about to explode? “It’s…talking about it makes me—I don’t know…”

Draco’s lips parted, eyes widening with understanding. “It’s because it turns you on, doesn’t it? You’re not just embarrassed, you’re hot and bothered.”

Of course she was hot and bothered. She was impaled on Theo’s cock. Hard to be anything but aroused.

Theo’s lips brushed against the blade of her shoulder. “You should’ve said something sooner.”

“A come kink.” Draco shook his head. “Wonders never cease, Granger.”

Oh Gods. She sighed. “That sounds dirty, Draco.”

Theo’s laughter was muffled against her back. “Delightfully dirty, you mean.”

“Are you going to keep making fun of me, or do you plan to—to fuck me?”

“We’re not making fun of you,” Draco said, fingers tipping her chin up. His eyes shined with sincerity. “It’s sexy. And if it helps, it turns me on, too.”

Theo hummed. “Like I said, delightfully dirty. And yes, if you’re finished being all flustered, I would like to fuck you. My bollocks are turning blue.”

Rather than answer, she shifted, rocking against him. Theo gripped her hips and thrust into her, setting up a pace far more punishing than Draco had fucked her with. With each thrust, his cock pressed against her front wall until she was trembling, caught in a dizzying state of arousal that left her aching. Without any friction on her clit, she was stuck in a holding pattern, a state of limbo close to the edge, but not close enough to fall off. Sure, she could reach down and touch herself, but her clit was swollen to the extent of almost hurting if she touched it directly. That, and this place on the edge was a blissful agony, one she wasn’t quite ready to escape from.

Draco took mercy on her and smiled. “You want a kiss?”

She nodded. She was having trouble sucking air into her lungs but that didn’t mean she didn’t want Draco’s lips on hers. He leaned in, brushing his mouth against hers softly before tracing the seam of her lips with the tip of his tongue. She parted for him, and his tongue swept against hers, just in time to swallow her moan as the arm Theo had wrapped around her shifted, banding lower, his palm pressing above her pubis.

That disconcerting, but not unwelcome pressure was back, creeping up on her. She tore her mouth away from Draco’s and panted. “I think I’m going to come again.”

“You think?” Theo laughed.

Her lips trembled, forming half words she couldn’t make her voice say.

Draco tucked a frizzing curl behind her ear and hummed. “Relax. You’re okay.” He glanced over her shoulder at Theo. “Whatever you do, don’t stop, okay?”

Theo grunted softly. “Didn’t intend to.”
Gods, it was going to happen again. The pressure inside her was too much, so much she felt like
she was about to cry if only to relieve the pressure. A choked sob slipped from between her lips.
“Draco.”

He shushed her softly. “You’re breathtaking when you come, Hermione. Just let it happen.”

Trembling, she was bloody trembling, the space beneath her breastbone tingling and her muscles
quivering as Theo fucked into her and then—

Her mouth opened on a silent scream as the dam within her burst, her muscles clenching down and
holding tight as her body turned itself inside out. It could’ve gone on for five seconds or five
minutes or five hours, but she wouldn’t have known because she was pretty sure she blacked out,
even her hearing dampening to a muted roar as blood whooshed inside her ears.

After however long it was, she blinked back to earth, the tub rather. Draco had both hands on the
sides of her neck, and he was staring at her with some appealing combination of awe and concern.
At her back, Theo was still, both his arms wrapped around her middle in a hug.

Her throat felt like she’d swallowed fine-grit sandpaper. “Hi.”

Draco smiled. “Hey yourself, Granger. You back with us?”

“I didn’t leave,” she muttered.

He laughed. “I’ve been saying your name for the past two minutes and you just sat there, shaking.”

Two minutes. Gods, it had seemed much, much longer than that. Still, her muscles were beginning
to protest from constantly clenching, not to mention kneeling in the tub. She shifted, but Theo’s
arms tightened, preventing her from going anywhere.

“Don’t.” He grumbled against her back. “That was a bloody religious experience, okay, Hermione?
I think I saw a Muggle god and everything, so give me a minute to recover, all right?”

She bit her lip and patted one of his hands. “It was brilliant for me as well.”

Draco lifted his hands. “I don’t know about you both, but I’m beginning to prune.”

“I don’t want to move,” Theo complained. “Fucking anti-apparation wards in the Manor, otherwise
I’d bloody well apparate us into bed.”

She laughed. “I believe apparition when intimately connected with someone is frowned upon.”

“No different than a regular side-along,” he argued. “Instead of holding my hand, you’re holding
my cock.”

Draco arched a brow. “I think that’s just asking to get splinched somewhere unpleasant.”

Theo shuddered. “Okay, never mind. I’m rather disturbed now, thank you.”

Glancing down at her hands revealed that she was beginning to prune, too. “Come on. Enough talk
of splinching. I don’t know about either of you, but I’m knackered.”

Draco let loose a yawn into his fist. “Here, let me grab towels.”

He stepped out of the tub and rifled through his clothing. He withdrew his wand from the pile and
accio’d towels from a linen closet on the other side of the bathroom before handing one to each of
them. It was the softest towel she’d ever wrapped around her body. “What’s this towel made of, unicorn hair? I think I might just wear this to bed.”

Theo grinned. “It’s cute how you think you’ll be wearing anything.”
It took her a moment to figure out what woke her. Draco’s room was dark, save for the warm glow emanating from the embers dying in the fireplace, so it wasn’t sunlight, the break of day. No, in fact, her mind was fuzzy, her eyes blurry as if she hadn’t fallen asleep all that long ago, maybe a couple hours max.

“Stop it! No! Not her! Please, not her!” Draco’s head thrashed against his pillow as he mumbled in his sleep. His words grew increasingly urgent, frenzied, as he desperately begged someone to stop. “I’ll do anything, just stop hurting her.”

He was having a nightmare and it didn’t require being the brightest witch of their age to wager what it was he dreaming about. Then again, he’d told her once, hadn’t he?

_I dream about it you know. That day. I hear Aunt Bellatrix cackling and all I can see is you bleeding on the carpet screaming and each time it happens, I swear I’ll do something, something different, stop her or light the whole bloody place on fire, but I never do. I just stand there. Like a coward. And waking up is no reprieve because nothing changes. I’m still a coward._

Her stomach hardened, bile burning her esophagus. Hand trembling, she reached out for him but paused. Was that the best thing to do, wake him up? Ron had once woken Harry up from a nightmare, back when they were all staying at the Burrow, and consequently caught a flying fist to the face. An accident, and nothing a little bruise paste couldn’t fix, but she didn’t want the same thing to happen.

Twisting, she shook Theo’s arm. “Theo, wake up.”

He grumbled. “What time is it?”

“Draco’s having a nightmare,” she whispered.

He inhaled sharply through his nose and lurched forward. “Fuck.”

Theo scrambled across her body, narrowly avoiding squashing her as crawled to Draco and he knelt over his squirming form. Draco’s words had turned incoherent, his pleas melting into sobs that made her eyes sting and her chest throb.

“Draco, wake up.” She couldn’t see, not in the dark, and accosting them with the light of her wand didn’t sound like a bright idea, so she was left to imagine what Theo was doing. From the way he shifted, she imagined him to be holding Draco’s arms, a good idea if only to avoid his thrashing or the possibility of an accidental swipe. “Come on, love, wake up.”
Draco gasped and tried to sit up, but Theo held him down, pinning him against the bed. “She’s—she’s—Hermione’s—”

“She’s right here, Draco, right here and she’s fine. It was just a nightmare,” Theo’s voice managed to be both soothing and leave no room for dispute. “See, she’s right here. Tell him you’re perfectly fine, Hermione.”

She shuffled closer. Her eyes had adjusted enough to see Theo practically sitting on top of Draco whose body was full of tension, ready to spring from the bed. She rested her hand on Draco’s bare arm and swallowed. “I’m fine, Draco. Theo’s right; you were dreaming.”

Theo let up on his hold so that Draco could reach for her. He performed a quick, nervous pat-down of her, searching for anything amiss, fingers stroking her face, her arms, knotting in her hair. “You’re okay?”

She bit the inside of her cheek to keep from crying and croaked. “I’m fine, I promise.”

A distressed whimper came from the back of his throat as he tugged her closer, struggling to pull her close enough for his apparent likes with Theo sitting on him. Catching on, Theo rolled off to Draco’s other side so that Draco was now in the middle, sandwiched on either side.

“Same dream?” Theo asked.

Draco nodded, his chin nudging the top of her head. He’d cradled her so close that she was halfway on top of him, her head resting high on his still-heaving chest. “Same dream.”

He didn’t go into further detail, didn’t need to. They all knew what he’d been dreaming about and why it was her he needed to hold, her he needed to be certain was all right.

In the time they’d been together, and of all the nights they’d spent in the same bed, Draco had never had a nightmare, at least not that she’d ever noticed. Certainly nothing as severe as this, with thrashing and sleep-talking. It must’ve been the stress of the day, seeing his father for the first time in months, her seeing his father, being in his home. His distress had bled into his subconscious, his dreams.

Theo had to have been thinking along the same lines because he said, “It’s been a while since you had one.”

She flicked her gaze up. Theo was running his fingers through Draco’s sleep-mussed hair. The ache in chest abated, just a little.

Draco blew out a noisy breath. His voice cracked, “I know.”

She rubbed the tip of her nose against his chest and clenched her eyes shut so she wouldn’t do something stupid like cry.

Draco’s voice was low, solemn when he next spoke, “I won’t ever let anyone hurt you again.”

His vow did nothing to staunch the stinging in her eyes.

There was no certainty in life. No one could say what would happen tomorrow or the next day or the day after, the next week, the next year. It was impossible to live through a war without learning the painful lesson that you could do all the right things, make all the right moves, and still, everything could go wrong.
But what was life without hope? It wasn’t *living*. And while the future might not have been certain, the here and now was. And presently she was fine, more than fine because she was in his arms.

Just as he would do anything and everything in his power to keep her safe—which was the essence of his promise—she would do the same for him, him and Theo both. Safe and happy, to the best of her ability, and above all else, loved. This was the most anyone could promise. “I know you won’t.”

Several minutes passed in silence, Draco’s chest rising and falling beneath her cheek, the soft sound of their breathing and the occasional rustle of the sheets the only sound in the room. After a moment, Theo spoke, “Do you want to talk about it this time, or no?”

*This time.* Did Draco ever want to discuss it?

“No really.” He sighed. “But I suppose I should.”

Her eyes widened in the dark.

“I don’t want to talk about the nightmare, no. That’s—we all know what that is,” Draco said. “But I think I’d like to talk about my father.”

He’d made the same conjecture she had, and Theo most likely, too, that his dream wasn’t random. Theo hummed. “I wouldn’t mind talking about that. Leave it to Lucius to throw us for a loop.”

“Do you think he can be believed? What he said?” Draco asked quietly. “Do you believe him?”

Oh, he was asking her. She cleared her throat and shrugged. “Honestly?”

She craned her neck. Draco nodded. “Honestly.”

“I think so. I don’t think he has much of a reason to lie, not a good one anyway. What does he have to gain from lying?” she asked.

“My mother’s favor,” Draco said.

“Narcissa would skin him alive if he lied just to get in her good graces only to renege.” Theo laughed.

“What does reneging even look like?” she mused. “So he says he’s sorry, that he approves of this, us, *me*, and then—what, changes his mind? At what point? After we’re engaged? Married? After he’s got grandchildren? What sort of long con is that?”

“He could be looking to curry favor, fix the family name.” Draco huffed. “I wouldn’t be surprised.”

“Then why go halfway? Why bother saying he’s still wary of Muggle influence? Why not go all the way and say he’s been reformed entirely?” she asked. “Why give us room to doubt him, to parse apart his apologies?”

Theo snorted. “Lucius is many things, a talented actor, yes, but a Muggle-lover? What’s the phrase, when hell freezes over?”

She worried the edge of her lip. “Several of his points were decent.”

Draco’s breath caught audibly. “*What?*”
“Not to be redundant, but yes, what?” Theo asked.

She shifted, reaching for her wand beneath the pillow. She turned the lights on, dim, but enough that she could see them when she spoke. “His point about eleven being a belated age to be introduced to this world? It was fair. I—I agree.”

Draco and Theo blinked. Draco asked, “You do?”

She shrugged. “I do, yes.”

“Why?” Draco shook his head slowly.

How could she explain in a way that they’d understand? It had nothing to do with their intelligence, but instead everything to do with the way she’d grown up being distinctly different, world’s different, than them.

She licked her lips. “I was four the first time I had an incident, a bout of accidental magic. My parents were out for the evening and my next door neighbor, Mrs. Roberts, was minding me. She told me it was time for bed, but I wasn’t finished reading. She took my book and I got angry and next thing I knew all my stuffed animals were flying across the room pelting her in the head. She refused to watch me after that.

“Lots of little things happened like that, nothing insidious, but unsettling for my parents who loved me and desperately wanted me to be well but didn’t understand in the slightest. And I didn’t want to worry them, so I tried to hide it when it happened. I knew I was different, my parents knew I was different, but we didn’t know what it was, and they tried to couch it, tried to smile and tell me I was special, but special is a hard pill to swallow when you’re a child and no one wants to play with you because you’re the strange girl who loves to read and once mysteriously caught a boy’s shoelaces on fire when he stole your book and threw it in the toilet.”

“You lit a boy on fire?” Draco’s eyes widened.

“His shoelaces,” she stressed, cheeks heating. “And it was an accident. So his shoes got a little singed and he smelled like rubber, but he was perfectly fine. And he was a bully.” The he deserved it was implied.

Theo chuckled. “You sure you weren’t supposed to be sorted into Slytherin?”

She wrinkled her nose.

Draco shook his head, but his eyes were soft and the curve of his lips was strangely fond. “Go on.”

“I don’t mean to insinuate that I had a bad childhood. I didn’t, it was great and my parents were wonderful. But I was…lonely. It wasn’t just that I was an only child and therefore often alone, but I felt lonely like I didn’t fit. So imagine my joy when Professor McGonagall showed up at my parents’ front door when I was eleven, telling me I was a witch. That I wasn’t a freak or strange, I was just different. That there was a place for me, other children like me, a whole world for people like me. I always knew on some level that I had magic, but to have it confirmed? I’d never been happier.

“Then imagine my…shock when upon entering the world where I apparently belong being told that I was different, less than, for being Muggleborn.” She swallowed, throat seizing up. “I got to feel like an outsider all over again, not just because people were telling me I didn’t belong, but because there was so much I didn’t know and do you know how much I loathe not knowing things?”
Her eyes stung, nose burning. She blinked fast, vision blurring. Draco reached out, but she shook her head. “Names of magical children are added to the book in the headmaster’s office upon birth, and yet instead of providing a warning or a gradual transition, eleven years are wasted. Eleven years with bouts of accidental magic, of wondering what’s wrong with you, Muggle parents not understanding why their children are different. Under the best circumstances they’re confused, but often they’re afraid. And then children get to feel displaced, their whole worlds turned upside down, and made to feel like outsiders in a world they belong.

“I love magic, you know that just like you know I love learning, but it shouldn’t be a child’s responsibility to fill in the gaps, to teach themselves and that’s what I had to do. Do you know how much I would’ve floundered had I not read *everything* I could get my hands on?” She laughed dryly. “And of course that served me well in many ways, but in others it did the opposite. I got branded a swot and an insufferable know-it-all for trying to prove myself, for doing what I could do to fit into a world I’d been dropped into like the deep end of a pool when I couldn’t swim.”

Draco sat up, leaning against the headboard. He raked his fingers through his hair. “And I was a prat and a bully who made your life hell.”

She rolled her eyes. “Don’t give yourself that much credit. My life wasn’t *hell*, Draco. But yes, you were a prat, but don’t even think about apologizing again or I’ll make you sleep in your giant bathtub. Another apology would enter firmly into the territory of beating a dead horse.”

His lips pulled to the side. “Understood. Apologies aside, I didn’t realize it was that difficult of a transition.”

“Agreed.” Theo winced. “I’m a little embarrassed to admit I never really considered what it would be like *not* growing up knowing about magic, let alone being surrounded by it.”

Draco nodded. “I always knew I was a wizard.”

She sighed. “It was difficult, but not knowing was all I knew at the time. Looking back, I can’t help but think of those eleven years as wasted in so many ways. Granted, I’m glad I received the primary education I did, and I wouldn’t trade my childhood with my parents, but if I could’ve known people like me? Not to mention, outside of that which was taught in the classroom, I *did* flounder. I sometimes feel like I’m *still* floundering. There are so many customs and traditions I don’t know about that you both just grew up knowing. I can’t believe I’m about to say this, but there really are *some* things that are difficult to learn from a book. And learning now is possible, obviously, but the mind is so much more malleable when you’re a child. And that brings up another point your father made that I agree with. Certain customs and traditions and magics are frowned upon simply for lack of understanding, but maybe if they were taught when children were younger, if an appreciation were established, maybe fear of the unknown would be stymied if the underlying ignorance were to be eradicated.”

“That goes both ways,” Draco mused. “I didn’t see a Muggle until I was nine when I went into London with my father for business and our jaunt through Muggle London was brief at best. Many Pureblood children know little if anything of Muggles and Muggleborns, so perhaps compulsory Muggle studies from a younger age could solve the issue, *some* of the issue.”

Theo looked chagrined. “My father told me Muggles were mongrels who ate with their bare hands and lived in their filth.” His whole face scrunched up. “Rather befuddling as he also told me they were out to steal our magic and were quite capable of doing so. Intelligent enough to fear and yet stupid enough to sneer at. It was difficult to reconcile those two lies with one another. Not that I believed him, mind you, but that’s not uncommon propaganda.”
She rolled her eyes. Deplorable, but not surprising. “I think everyone could benefit from a more comprehensive education.”

“But how?” Draco asked. “How would that work?”

Theo covered his mouth, yawning. She glanced at the curtained window and frowned. “What time is it?”

Draco grabbed his wand, casting a quick tempus. Twelve minutes to four in the morning. Merlin.

“We should go back to bed. We can discuss this in the morning,” she said.

Theo shook his head. “I’m fine.”

Draco nodded. “I don’t think I can go back to sleep right yet.”

Of course. Whenever she had nightmares, she could seldom go straight back to sleep without fear of winding up right back inside the blasted dream. And truthfully, she wasn’t tired, either. Talking about this had her fired up, her blood thrumming. Maybe it was the failure of the system, maybe it was because the issue hit so close to home, but she hadn’t felt as incensed by an injustice since she had formed S.P.E.W. Even the passion behind that project was dwarfed by what she felt now. “I think your mother has the right idea about opening a primary school.”

“It’s a good idea,” Draco said. “And I know Mother’s rather attached to it.”

Theo nodded. “Most of us were homeschooled. I had a governess from Russia.” He shivered. “Had there been the option of a primary school, I’d have wanted to go.”

“It won’t be easy,” she said. “Narcissa’s running into early issues with funding, but those should be easy enough to solve with private donations. It’s keeping the school funded while also keeping it tuition free since money shouldn’t be a barrier to receiving an education. Not to mention attracting reputable staff, paying said staff, crafting a proper and comprehensive curriculum, convincing magical parents that the idea of sending their students to primary school has merit, working with Hogwarts and the Ministry to gain access to the names of Muggleborns, working around the Statute of Secrecy to inform Muggle parents of their children’s magic, convincing those parents to send their young children to a strange magical school, oh! And transportation for those students. Could we trust five-year-olds to Floo? Maybe if their fireplaces were only connected to the school we could—”

“Hermione, breathe.” Draco smiled. “If anyone can figure it out, it’s you.”

She froze. “Me? No, I was just thinking, theorizing.”

Theo arched a brow. “So you’re saying you have zero interest in helping with the school? None at all?”

“Well…” She paused. Since the war ended, nothing had lit a fire beneath her. Not the idea of working for the Ministry be it as an auror or Unspeakable. Nothing had fit. Even the idea of pursuing a Mastery hadn’t appealed because, which one? Charms? No. Transfiguration? Eh. Potions? Doubtful. But this? The idea of educating a new generation of witches and wizards, young witches and wizards, of helping mold young minds and instill a passion for learning, a reverence for magic, constant curiosity, and to prevent the same ignorance that had caused her grief over the years? “I might be interested.”

Draco smirked. “You might be? Is that right?”
She rolled her eyes. “Okay, fine. Yes, I’m interested. Quite interested. But that doesn’t change the fact that it won’t be easy.”

“And like Draco said, if anyone can figure it out, it’s you,” Theo said. “You and Narcissa. The two of you together would be a force to be reckoned with. The Ministry won’t stand a chance.”

“It would be worth it.” She bit her lip. “But this is all assuming Narcissa even wants my help.”

Draco and Theo shared a look. “Granger, love, I’d bet all the Galleons in Gringotts that was the reason my mother mentioned the school in the first place.”

***

Lucius wasn’t in the dining room when they made it down for breakfast, but Narcissa was.

“Morning, Mother,” Draco greeted, rounding the table to press a kiss to Narcissa’s cheek. His shoulders had dropped, relaxing when he realized his father wasn’t around.

“Good morning, dear,” Narcissa patted his arm softly.

“You’re looking resplendent as always this morning.” Theo said, mimicking Draco and kissing Narcissa’s cheek.

She rolled her eyes, but it was clear from the smile on her face that she found Theo’s charms as endearing as Hermione did. “Good morning, Theodore. And Hermione, dear, good morning to you. I trust you all slept well?”

Her face heated. That was always going to be slightly awkward, Draco’s mother referencing their sleeping together, even if she only meant in the sense of sharing a bed. “Yes, thank you.”

Best not to mention Draco’s nightmare, really.

Narcissa briefly dropped her eyes to her plate, but it was evident from the subtle smirk tugging at her lips that she’d caught Hermione’s blush, a fact which only intensified the heat pricking at her cheeks. “By all means, join me. Milly just brought all this food out so it shouldn’t require any heating.”

“Where’s Lucius this morning?” Theo asked, taking a seat and reaching for the teapot in the middle of the table.

Narcissa’s smile faltered. “He’s having a bit of a lie in.”

Draco’s spoon clicked against the edge of his cup in an uncharacteristically ungraceful fashion. “A lie in?”

She cleared her throat. “Yes. He had a rough night, Draco.”

Hermione stared at the grapes on her plate, not wanting to give her thoughts away by glancing over at Draco.

Theo hummed. “Well, I don’t imagine he has much business to attend to, what with, you know, being on house arrest.”

“He has plenty of business with which to attend,” Narcissa said, primly setting her fork aside. “Lucius has no intention to languish for the next three years. Malfoys are neither slothful nor slovenly, Theodore. We have purpose.”
The furrow in Draco’s brow wasn’t perturbed, but rather looked thoughtful. “What exactly is that purpose?”

Narcissa blinked. “I beg your pardon, Draco?”

He sighed. “Mother, I love you, but come off it, please. You know what I mean. Our house motto is *sanctimonia vincet semper*. Excuse me if the notion of purity always conquering seems rather in direct opposition to the new leaf we’ve all agreed to turn over. What exactly *is* this purpose of which you speak?”

He had a point.

Narcissa shook her head. “Yes, our motto is…antiquated, perhaps, but the Malfoy *purpose* is and always has been to take care of family first. Your father was correct; he has made grievous mistakes, mistakes that despite his intentions have had consequences for our family. He’s determined to set things to rights and return honor to our family name in hopes that perhaps one day you and your children and their children will once more be proud to call themselves Malfoys.”

“What does that mean?” Draco shook his head.

Narcissa shut her eyes and took a deep breath. The crests of her high cheekbones flushed prettily. When she opened her eyes, she shot Hermione a brief look and cleared her throat. “Money, Draco. Your father intends to examine our finances and determine exactly how much damage the war—*he* has done—to our vaults. Then he intends to suss out just how much *more* we can reasonably part with, and that sum will be donated. It will be a quiet donation, an overstated sum donated in an understated manner. But of course we won’t be able to do anything if *someone* were to find out and leak the good deed to the press, thus polishing off *some* of the tarnish to the family name. And finally, your father intends to recuperate our losses, altruistic though they may be, through careful investments as he has always done, quite well. Do you understand?”

Draco pressed his lips together and nodded.

Narcissa turned to Hermione, lips twisting to the side. “My apologies for being so frank in discussing an impolite subject, Hermione.”

“It’s fine.” And it really was. She wasn’t a fool. Of course the Malfoys were concerned with money. No one amassed a fortune such as theirs without being money-minded, without caring about their gold. And that it was their intention to covertly let slip to the press their good deeds? If Narcissa thought Hermione would be aghast that their altruism came with a side of self-serving, well, she was mistaken. She knew who she was dealing with. But she did wonder… “Though I must ask—the orphanage and primary school, is that also a means to the same end? Polishing the tarnish off your family name?”

Narcissa pursed her lips. “*That* is simply the right thing to do. As a matter of fact, the Malfoy name is only a hindrance to that cause.”

She frowned. “What do you mean?”

Narcissa sighed. “As I mentioned, the Ministry wants little to do with the school. They also aren’t keen to pay much attention to any correspondence that crosses their desks adorned with the Malfoy name or seal, let alone requests. And believe me when I say it is most unfortunate that an endeavor such as the establishment of a primary school, the first of its kind, cannot be properly undertaken without Ministry approval. While the funding would not be government provided, there are other…necessities only the Ministry and Hogwarts can provide.”
Hermione nodded. “If you intend to admit Muggleborn students, their names must be provided. And that would require Ministry approval. You’d also need their approval in contacting the families of those students otherwise it would be a violation of the Statute of Secrecy.”

“And the approval of the Board of Governors at Hogwarts is needed in addition to that of the Headmistress,” Narcissa added. “But I don’t mean to complain. It’s a worthy undertaking.”

Draco cleared his throat. “Hermione said the same thing.”

Narcissa tilted her head, eyeing a spark of renewed interest. “Oh?”

Considering what Draco had said about his mother perhaps having mentioned the idea to her with the express purpose of wooing her to the cause, she struggled to restrain an eye roll. “Yes. You must’ve known I’d be intrigued by the idea. Draco seems to think it’s the reason you mentioned it to me in the first place.”

Theo chuckled under his breath.

Narcissa lifted her napkin and delicately dabbed at the corners of her mouth. “Having a Gryffindor in the house certainly is refreshing. I have no doubt you’ll keep us all on our toes, won’t you?”

Hermione smiled, mostly because the words didn’t feel as if they’d been intended as an insult. “As with all my pursuits, I’ll endeavor to do my best.”

Everyone laughed.

Narcissa smiled at Draco and then at her. “Words cannot do justice to express how pleased I am that the fates have seen fit to bring you into our lives, Hermione. But to answer your question, or rather, your deduction—my son’s deduction—the answer is yes. It had been my hope you might find yourself as passionate about the cause as I am. Would it be safe to say you wish to be involved?”

She nodded. “I think it will be difficult, but yes.”

Draco pushed his plate aside and stood. “Not to be rude, but I think I’ll leave you to discuss this. If you see Father, please tell him I’ll be in the study. If he plans to examine our finances, I think it’s only right I give my input. I have a few charities I wouldn’t mind the money going to.”

Narcissa smiled. “Of course, Draco. As you are the heir and of age, you are correct it is your right, but your father also expressed the same desire. I think he’d like your help.”

Draco frowned. “All right.”

“I’ll join you, if you don’t mind,” Theo said, standing. “As much as I hate to admit it, I, too, need to look into the Nott finances. I’d hire someone to set everything to rights for me, but I trust my father’s solicitor about as far as I can throw him.”

“Planning on giving some galleons away, too, eh?” Draco asked, smirking.

Theo huffed. “Some. Not like I can’t part with a few thousand.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “If you need charities, I can give suggestions.”

Theo chuckled. “Creature rights, yes, I know.” He turned to Draco. “If she had her way, she’d turn us into paupers, I think.”
“You exaggerate,” she said, smiling. “I’m only saying, if you have a few thousand galleons you could reasonably and willingly part with, you could at least consider giving some of them to, I don’t know, elf rights or giant welfare.”

Theo ignored her. “Draco, I wonder, how much yarn do you think I could buy with a thousand galleons?”

Draco smirked. “Certainly enough for a knitted hat or two.”

“Stop it,” Hermione said. “Go count your galleons, Merlin. Your mother and I have important matters to discuss.”

Draco rounded the table and kissed the top of her head. He drew back, dropping his lips to her ear. “You’ll like the causes I have in mind. I promise.”

Across the table, Narcissa was pretending not to watch, but the pleased little smile and twinkle in her eyes was a dead giveaway.

Unlike Draco, Theo pressed a noisy kiss to her cheek, making her flush and scrunch her eyes. He grinned. “When we’re married, you can knit our galleons into the hats you make for elves for all I care.”

She laughed and shoved him away. “Go be a prat somewhere else.”

Theo clutched his chest. “I’m shocked. Shocked and hurt and I’ve never been thus—”

Draco grabbed the back of Theo’s collar and tugged. “Come on, you overgrown child.”

Theo smirked. “You love me anyway.”

“Sometimes I wonder why,” Draco muttered.

Theo dropped his voice and his lids. “I don’t.”

With a groan, Draco hauled Theo out of the dining room leaving her alone with Narcissa for the second time. She was much less on edge this time, much more at ease as she sipped her tea and smiled across the table, cheeks still warm, but her embarrassment waning.

“I must commend you for the handle you have on them both.” Narcissa laughed. “Theodore can be a handful, but as I’m sure you’re well aware by this point, he’s harmless.”

For all his joking bravado, Theo could also be downright intense to the point of quickening her pulse, not that Narcissa knew that. She swallowed and reached for her tea. Ruminating on Theo’s intensity and his favorite ways to direct that intensity was a bad idea. She cleared her throat. “He’s…Theo.”

Narcissa laughed softly. “That he is. And you all complement each other beautifully.”

She bit her lip and nodded. “I think so.”

She more than thought so, she knew it, but they had other matters to discuss.

“So, the school,” she said.

Narcissa nodded and refilled her cup. “Yes, the school. My sister and I have made strides with the orphanage, mostly because the Ministry approves and knows it is a necessity. The primary school
is a different story.”

“Would you say the Ministry is the biggest roadblock?” she asked.

“The first, really,” Narcissa said. “We can’t get off the ground without it. We could, I suppose, but to what extent when there would be no students to attend?”

“No Muggleborn students to attend,” Hermione amended. “Do you foresee an issue with convincing magical parents to enroll their children?”

Narcissa added a dash of milk to her tea and sighed. “An issue? No. A headache? Yes. Few of the women in my social circles have young children, and few of their children have children of primary school age. Ophelia Bulstrode, née Parkinson, Pansy’s older sister, is currently pregnant, and I know Hillaria Selwyn has a little one. Other than that, there aren’t many children, sadly.”

“And you don’t believe they’ll have an issue sending their children to primary school with Halfbloods and Muggleborns?”

Narcissa chuckled beneath her breath. “I’m certain with a bit of…persuasion and a few reminders about misplaced loyalties, they could be convinced to enroll their children. I’m more concerned that others might take issue with sending their children off to school with the offspring of”—Narcissa dropped her voice—“Death Eaters.”

Hermione frowned. “Surely Andromeda plans to enroll Teddy.”

Narcissa paused, head tilting. “Yes, she does. I had no idea you were familiar with Teddy, though I suppose should’ve known. You knew his parents, yes?”

Hermione smiled sadly. “I did, yes. He’s Harry’s godson, too, did you know?”

“I wasn’t aware.” Narcissa shook her head. “Andromeda will be far more persuasive in convincing parents to enroll their children, certainly. But as of now, we have the guarantee of Teddy’s enrollment and the orphans, of course.”

There had to be more children than that. “Well…I’m not insinuating that it was your intention, but it certainly wouldn’t hurt to have my open support of the school, and needless to say, Harry will gladly give his, especially with his godson attending.”

Narcissa smiled over the edge of her teacup. “It wouldn’t hurt, you’re correct.”

“So that’s about all we can say for enrollment at this point,” Hermione said. “On to the matter of funding. It would be private, I know, but that’s another area Harry and I would be glad to help with. I’m not saying we’re flush, but our Orders of Merlin did come with compensation. And I’m sure Ron and much of the rest of the Order of the Phoenix would be willing to contribute.”

“As will we.” Narcissa nodded. “And I have no doubt Theodore would be happy to donate, along with a number of other families who at the very least wish to—”

“Polish off the tarnish?”

Narcissa smiled wryly. “Indeed.”

“So funding, at least the initial funding needed to construct the school and get it running, shouldn’t be an issue.”
“Theoretically, we should be able to reasonably sustain the school with the help of private donors indefinitely,” she said.

“While keeping the school tuition-free, yes?” Hermione asked. “The last thing I want is for money to serve as a barrier to students receiving an education.”

That was an issue she refused to budge on. If only the most privileged students could attend, what good were they doing?

Narcissa set her tea aside and nodded. “Of course.”

She sighed in relief. “Good.”

“Truly, the two biggest issues I see are receiving assistance from the Ministry and Hogwarts, and securing eligible staff.”

No wonder Narcissa had hoped to endear Hermione to the cause. She bit back a smile. “I have a feeling I can…call in a few favors at the Ministry and Hogwarts.”

Narcissa smiled benignly, but her eyes were bright. “Oh?”

Hermione laughed softly. “Kingsley owes me and Professor—Headmistress McGonagall and I are close. Not to mention, I don’t see her having any issue with an endeavor that would make knowledge more accessible and better prepare a new generation for the rigors of Hogwarts.”

“To have the Minister for Magic owe you.” Narcissa shook her head, clearly impressed. “And he’ll be amenable to you calling in a debt in this manner?”

She shrugged. “I don’t see why not. And if he does, I can always have Harry call in his favor.”

She wasn’t one to throw around her titles, her status as a war hero, but if it was for a good cause…

“And as for the staff, there’s no precedent for hiring teachers at a primary school, is there?”

Narcissa frowned. “There isn’t. At Hogwarts, Masters or the equivalent are hired as professors. We’d be creating an entirely new profession with standards and eligibility from scratch.”

That was a problem. Though, if she’d learned anything from her time spent in primary school, Muggle though it was, enthusiasm and a love of children was often the greatest factor in what made a teacher great. “I think willingness is certainly the greatest factor. The most important to begin with, at least.”

Narcissa laughed. “Indeed. Severus was a good man, but I’m aware he wasn’t the most beloved professor. At least not outside of Slytherin.”

An image of Snape sitting cross-legged on a rug teaching a group of five-year-olds with sticky fingers and running noses was enough to make her eyes water with restrained laughter. “No. I think we need a softer touch. Perhaps we could recruit based on high aptitude. N.E.W.T scores?”

Slowly, Narcissa nodded. “Younger teachers would certainly be more…open-minded. Did you have anyone in mind?”

Perhaps she did, but she’d hold her tongue for now. “I might.”

With a wave of her hand, Narcissa brushed aside Hermione’s secrecy. “There’s time for staffing the school and I trust your judgment. Just as I trust your judgment on the curriculum.”

Narcissa smirked. “I’m sorry, did you not have an opinion on the classes to offer?”

Of course she did. But Narcissa was interested in those opinions? “I do…”

“And?” Narcissa gestured for her to go on.

She cleared her throat. “Well, first I think it would be imperative to go over what magical children are often taught at home.”

Narcissa traced the rim of her teacup with one long, elegant finger. “Draco was educated in History, Etiquette, French, Grammar, Literature, and Mathematics.”

She nodded. “And would you say it was the same for his peers?”

“Purebloods, yes.” Narcissa pursed her lips. “Most Purebloods, I mean. I’m sure the Weasleys were educated in the domestic arts as opposed to French.”

She bit back a grimace. “Muggleborns are often educated in similar topics. Reading, writing, history, occasionally a foreign language, science, mathematics—to what level of maths would you say most magical children are taught?”

Narcissa frowned and shook her head. “Addition and subtraction. Maybe multiplication? Perhaps an unsavory truth, but usually heirs are most educated in maths as they’re the ones expected to handle the finances one day. I was taught only so much as to manage in my studies at Hogwarts and to sufficiently plan the menu for dinner parties.”

She wrinkled her nose. “I’m not suggesting we broach calculus, but I think far more students would thrive in Potions and Arithmancy if they gained a foundation in algebra.”

Narcissa’s cheeks went pink and she looked away. “As I said, I trust your judgment. If you think this… algebra is necessary, then by all means.”

Hermione shifted in her chair. Gods, she hadn’t meant to… embarrass the woman. “Right. So mathematics; literature which could encompass reading of both Magical and Muggle texts, writing, and grammar; history of magic; etiquette…perhaps more of a magical cultural studies? I know I would’ve benefited from that.”

“Of course.” Narcissa nodded.

“Muggle studies…we wouldn’t want it to be redundant for Muggleborns but perhaps a class to incorporate Muggle culture and technology at an age-appropriate level that would catch magical students up to speed while enriching the knowledge of Muggleborns? I don’t know, I think there will be a learning curve for us, too. Science would benefit everyone, what with biology and chemistry and even physics helping with an understanding of Potions and Transfiguration and especially Alchemy.”

“I think as long as students are being educated in all the usual studies, magical parents wouldn’t balk at science in the curriculum.” Narcissa shrugged delicately. “And French, you mustn’t forget French.”

Hermione smiled. “And French.” Her smiled slipped. “Do we need to worry with establishing a Board of Governors?”
“Perhaps. Though I wouldn’t fret. Historically, the Board of Governors at Hogwarts has been comprised of old families, needless to say, Pureblood families. In this instance, it would be donors.”

“So we’ll be throwing it, basically?” Hermione smiled. “Malfoys, Nott, Potter, Weasleys, me—”

“I much prefer to think of it as stacking the deck in our favor,” Narcissa said.

Hermione laughed. “Well, then, I think our next step would be contacting donors, the Ministry, and Hogwarts. I can owl Harry and Ron, several of the other Weasleys perhaps. I’ll also owl Kingsley, and I’ll speak with the Headmistress next week.”

Narcissa clasped her hands together. “Perfect. I’ll contact the Bulstrodes and Parkinsons along with a few other families with children who are engaged or recently married, and I’ll also be in touch with my sister.”

She nodded. “I think we’re off to a great start.”

“I agree most whole-heartedly.” Narcissa smiled. “I do have one question. A curiosity, more like.”

She nodded. “Okay?”

“When you said you perhaps have teachers in mind, were you speaking of yourself, perchance?” Narcissa asked.

Hermione bit the inside of her cheek. “I guess we’ll have to wait until we see my N.E.W.T scores, won’t we?”

Chapter End Notes

Small note! I've outlined the rest of this, and I think we're looking at six more chapters, or maybe four and a two-part epilogue. Just as a heads up :) Again, thank you so much for reading, commenting, and leaving kudos. You're all amazing, and I'm so thrilled you've been enjoying this story that popped into my head :)

I should have the next update posted by Saturday at the latest!
Several cups of tea and a plate of apple fritters later—according to Milly, they were Draco’s favorite—Hermione left the dining room in search of Draco and Theo with two extra fritters tucked into a napkin. Narcissa, smiling at the smuggled food, had given Hermione directions to the study. Up the stairs and take a right, all the way down the hall, make another right at the end, halfway down that hall, turn left at the bust of Septimus Malfoy, down that hall, a right after the portrait of Brutus Malfoy, third door on the left.

Merlin, the place was a maze. Even following Narcissa’s directions to the letter, something had to have gone wrong because there was no right after the portrait of Brutus Malfoy. There wasn’t even a left. Just a long, straight hall that appeared to never end. And when she turned back around, beginning to retrace her steps, the hall she’d turned down?

Gone.

Deep breath. It wasn’t as if she could actually get lost, and even if she did, it wasn’t as if the house would swallow her up. She forced down the rising wave of panic and returned to the portrait. Only, now what?

“Mudblood.”

Eyes narrowed and hand on her wand, she turned and—of course. Brutus bloody Malfoy sneered down at her from his portrait. She wracked her brain. What did she know of this particular ancestor of Draco’s? Very little. A second glance at the placard on the frame listed his year of death as 1699. Seventeenth century…nothing. She knew nothing of this particular Malfoy, other than, like most of the others, he hated Muggleborns, clearly.

“Filthy, magic stealing mudblood,” he taunted. His hair, platinum like all the other Malfoys she’d ever seen, was parted down the middle and tied with a strip of leather. The length of his hair was tossed over his shoulder as he sat at a desk, quill and parchment at hand.

She rolled her eyes. “Yes, yes, I’m a stain upon the household. Scum under your shoe. All you dead Pureblood bigots are exactly alike.”

Walburga Black was no different. Could they not at least attempt to hurl a unique barb at her now and then? Merlin, the slur itself was beginning to dull. Having it carved into her arm had really taken the cake, making it so merely hearing it didn’t sting quite as badly.

The painted eyes of Brutus Malfoy narrowed as he stared down his nose at her. “Such insolence. You’ve stolen our magic and used it to bewitch the minds of this generation of Malfoys, feeble-minded though they must be. A certain mark of weak-mindedness and even weaker magic it is, the desire to associate with non-magical folk.”

She stared dully back at the portrait. Did she really intend to argue with a dead man? The mere likeness of a dead man? She glanced down the never-ending hall that stretched behind her and continued on in a dizzying cream-colored infinity before her. Apparently, she had nothing better to do until someone stumbled upon her, which in a house this size could take ages. “That makes no sense. No one in your family is consorting with non-magical folk. Muggleborn though I am, I am
magical, therefore you’re spouting nonsense.”

He scoffed. “Stolen magic. It’s not yours. No natural magic could reside in blood so impure, so muddy.”

No wonder Draco had been such a prat of a child, growing up in a house with portraits such as this on the wall. It was a miracle he hadn’t been worse.

She opened her mouth to refute the notion that magic could be stolen with supporting evidence from the first Fundamental Law of Magic that clearly stated you could not divide what was clearly not meant to be divided without grave consequence. Magic was as intrinsic to a person as their soul, and therefore to steal magic would be impossible. One’s magical core could be weakened, and even fractured along with their soul, as was the case with horcruxes, and technically it could be removed, as was the case of the Dementor’s kiss, but magic could not be stolen to be used. To steal it would be to render it useless.

“You’re rusty on your Fundamental Laws of Magic, Brutus.”

She turned, hand flying to her chest as she nearly spun into Lucius. She cleared her throat. “Mr. Malfoy. Hello. I was actually looking for you. Your study, rather. Narcissa gave me directions but something must’ve gone amiss.”

Brutus Malfoy continued to hurl insults at her back.

Lucius frowned. He looked tired, bags beneath his bloodshot eyes, but he still did not appear as to have spent the past nine months in prison. “Ah, yes. This part of the house contains a number of enchantments of which my wife must’ve forgotten.”

“Enchantments?” That sounded decidedly not good. And dangerous to boot. Tucking her fingers into her pocket, she stroked the vine wood of her wand for comfort at best, protection if came down to it.

He nodded. “Don’t worry. Nothing insidious. Disillusionment and repellant charms, mostly. Intended to keep…well, to be quite honest, Muggleborns away. Anyone of less than pure blood, possibly.”

Brutus snickered and maybe it was immature and silly, but she shot him a glare over her shoulder.

Lucius sighed. “Miss Granger, this is Brutus Malfoy, best known for his work with the anti-Muggle periodical Warlock at War. Brutus, this is Miss Hermione Granger, Order of Merlin, first class, and Draco’s intended. Well, one of them, but I’m sure you’ve met Theodore a time or two.”

Brutus curled his lip. “Intended? As in he intends to sully the House of Malfoy with this chit?”

She couldn’t have given less of a damn about what a dead ancestor thought of her, so she watched Lucius’s face as he answered. He smiled serenely at the portrait. “Indeed.”

Ignoring the protestations of the painting, Lucius turned his gaze on her. “You’re terribly turned around, I take it?”

She crossed her arms. “Your wife told me to turn right at the portrait of Brutus. All I see is one long stretch of hall before and behind me.”

Lucius hummed, frowning slightly. “How interesting. I was aware of the enchantments, but I myself have never known exactly how they conceal, not being Muggleborn myself, obviously.”
“Obviously,” she said.

With an imperious arch of his brow, Lucius extended his hand, palm up. She stared.

Lucius sighed. “I have no wand, Miss Granger, nor do I possess ill intent toward you. I merely wish to show you the way to the study. For future reference.”

“Couldn’t you just remove the enchantments?”

“That would require a cursebreaker and time.” He wiggled his fingers. “This will be quick.”

Before she could talk herself out of it, she placed her hand in his and allowed him to tug her toward… the wall. It was a wide stretch of wall, granted, but it looked quite solid and—

It wasn’t a wall at all, nor was it solid. Much like Platform 9 ¾, she was able to move right through what had appeared to be a wall and into the aforementioned hallway.

Lucius dropped her hand and gestured to a door. “The study. Though I should tell you, Draco and Theo left ten minutes ago.”

Of course they had. She sighed. Her little jaunt through the halls and past raving, bigoted portraits had apparently been for naught. “Do you happen to know where they went?”

Fingers crossed there would be no more enchantments. Maybe she could just call Milly…

“Back to Draco’s rooms, I believe,” he said. “Come along, I’ll get you past the enchantments.”

He didn’t reach for her this time, merely stepped through the wall as if it weren’t there at all. She followed, both hurrying past the portrait of Brutus who huffed and sneered at the sight of her. They walked down the hall in silence, save for the sound of their footfalls against the thin hall runner covering the dark, wooden floor.

Lucius stopped beside another swath of wall and stared between her and the space in question. She turned to the wall and—“Oof.”

Her knee knocked into the wall. The very solid wall that was in no way a disguised hall.

Lucius pursed his lips, but those silver eyes of his were full of laughter.

She rolled her eyes. “Very funny.”

Lucius shrugged. “Azkaban offered very little in terms of entertainment. Forgive me.”

It hadn’t really hurt. And okay, it was a little funny. But only a little.

But he didn’t need to know that. “Could you please just point me in the direction of the disillusioned hall?”

Lucius pointed at the same wall, several feet away. She stepped toward it and, having learned her lesson, led with her fingers. Her hand disappeared clean through the wall. “Thank you.”

“You’re very welcome, Miss Granger.”

With a small smile, she turned and disappeared through the wall.
Draco and Theo were lounging on the chaise in front of the fire when she entered the room. She almost didn’t want to disturb them; Draco’s head was resting on Theo’s shoulder, Theo’s head in turn resting against Draco’s head. They looked comfortable, their legs splayed out in front of them, hands twined loosely together against the top of Theo’s thigh. Their eyes were closed, but Draco’s flashed open when she shut the door behind her.

“Hey,” he greeted, prompting Theo to open his eyes and lift his head.

Theo rolled his neck from side to side. “Nice talk?”

She crossed the room. “It was. How was your morning?”

Draco looked tired, in need of a nap or at least a day spent lounging regardless of the fact that Malfoys were not slothful. This one deserved to be, if only for a day. “Decent.”

Reaching inside the pocket of her robes, she withdrew the napkin containing the apple fritters she’d saved for them. “I brought these for you. Both of you, if Draco’s willing to share.”

The smell alone was a giveaway, sweet apple and yeasty dough with a touch of spice. She unwrapped it partially and wafted it tantalizingly in front of Draco’s face. His lids dropped and he groaned. “I adore you.”

Theo snickered. “Are you speaking to Hermione, or the fritter?”


She nodded. “Want them now, or later with tea?”

His nose scrunched adorably and her heart did a ridiculous somersault. According to the photos his mother had whipped out the other night, that little nose wrinkle had been something he’d done since he was a baby.

“Later,” Draco said. “But can you put them somewhere I can’t smell them?”

She laughed and carried the fritters over to the table beside his bed before returning to the couch. Draco reached out and she leaned in, kissing him softly. His lips curved against hers just before she pulled away.

“So, what does decent mean?” she asked, taking a seat beside Draco.

He tapped on her leg and she shifted, tossing both her legs across their laps. Theo quickly divested her of her shoes, tossing her flats to the floor before digging his thumbs into the arch of her foot. She swallowed her moan and wiggled her toes, silently asking for more.

“It means my father didn’t do anything to make me want to scream at him again,” Draco said, resting his hands on her knees. “And our finances aren’t quite as dismal as any of us thought.”

“That was quick.” That time when Theo pressed his fingers into a knot she didn’t even know she had in her sole, she couldn’t hold back the moan that slipped out. He waggled his brows and grinned. She shook her head. “I know Narcissa and I spoke for a while, but it couldn’t have been long enough to contact Gringotts.”

Draco pulled a face. “No, but the Ministry left detailed documentation of what they took for reparations. Believe it or not, it was less than any of us had anticipated. That’s assuming their numbers are accurate—which we don’t, by the way—but even doubling the sum for good measure,
just to be safe, we’re still—"

“Filthy fucking rich,” Theo said.

Draco cleared his throat. “I was going to say flush, but yes. That.”

“What about you?” she asked, looking at Theo.

He shrugged. “Oh, I don’t know, actually. I assume the Ministry left detailed documentation for me as well, but I haven’t been to Nott Manor since this summer when my house arrest was lifted. I’m going to wager the reparations were greater, considering my father’s life sentence, but I’m not concerned. If they emptied the Nott vaults entirely, I still have my personal vault I gained access to when I came of age. I was left a generous sum from my mother’s family.” Theo grinned. “So don’t worry, love, I’m sure I’m filthy fucking rich, too.”

She rolled her eyes. “I’m sorry, were you under the impression I cared about your vaults?”

“Only in regard to how much we can donate to creature welfare.” Theo pointed out.

Draco chuckled. “Speaking of which, though we don’t have exact numbers, we did begin a list of charities for donations. Father was open to my suggestions.”

“The school is a given, yes?” she asked.

They both nodded.

“Good. It sounds as if we all had productive mornings,” she said.

Theo hummed. “Quite. Size of my vault aside, I think I’ve decided to sell the Manor.”

Her brows rose. “Really?”

He nodded. “Really. As I said, I haven’t been home in months. I don’t have an affinity for the place, no good memories. Mostly terrible ones, to be honest. I could remodel, but to what end? Let’s be honest here, do we need two Manors?”

Seeing as most people didn’t even have one…

“Besides, there’s the property in Wales.” He shrugged. “You know, in case the kids feel slighted one day. This place being called Malfoy Manor and all.”

“I don’t see how any reasonable person could feel slighted with a single room in this place, let alone what I’m sure will be an entire wing.”

Draco cleared his throat. “Don’t forget about the summer home we have in France.”

Letting her head fall back against the arm of the couch, she sighed. Merlin, how much money did they have? Scratch that, she didn’t want to know.

“Point being, we don’t need Nott Manor with its drab décor and gruesome memories and no doubt complex enchantments that I don’t, for the life of me, have an idea how to go about undoing,” Theo said.

She lifted her head. “Speaking of enchantments, I got lost today.”

Draco frowned sharply. “What do you mean?”
“I mean, your mother gave me directions to the study and I was supposed to turn at the portrait of your truly dastardly ancestor Brutus, but the hall wasn’t there,” she explained. “Luckily your father showed up.”

Stranger words had never been spoken. Luckily Lucius had shown up. Gods, how odd.

“The hall…wasn’t there?” Theo asked, brow furrowed.

She nodded. “Like Platform 9 ¾. Anti-Muggleborn charm, apparently. Possibly, anyone who isn’t a Pureblood, Lucius wasn’t certain. All I could see was wall and endless hall to my front and back. I couldn’t even retrace my steps because the first turn disappeared on me, too. Lucius found me arguing with the portrait and guided me through. Of course, you had left by then, I later found.”

Draco cut his eyes. “He didn’t say anything to you, did he?”

“Nothing awful, if that’s what you mean.” She shrugged. “Actually, he introduced me to Brutus as your intended and seemed to think it was funny when your ancestor had a conniption.”

Draco hummed. “And he didn’t remove the enchantments?”

“He said we’d need a cursebreaker.”

Draco squeezed her knee. “Then we’ll get a cursebreaker. I’m not going to have you getting lost in my own bloody house.”

“There’s no rush.” She shrugged. “And really, I could’ve called Milly.”

Theo shook his head. “No, Draco’s right. Sure you could call an elf, but you shouldn’t have to. Plus, who knows what other enchantments there are lingering around the upper floors?”

“I know the main floor is fine since Mother redid the place, but I don’t spend much time wandering around the rest of the house,” Draco said.

Their concern was sweet, but really not necessary. “And if you don’t spend much time wandering around the rest of your home, you think I will?”

Draco sighed. “Granger, it wasn’t a question, nor do I need your permission.”

Merlin. “Fine. Do whatever you’d like.”

Draco nodded. “I intend to.”

She scoffed, crossing her arms. He didn’t have to be such a prat about it.

Theo made a soft, discontented noise. “Hermione, it’s not that Draco or I think you can’t take care of yourself, but you shouldn’t have to worry here.”

Draco’s jaw hardened. “Yes. And quite frankly, I don’t fancy the idea of my children getting lost or trapped in their home if they wander as children are wont to do.”

“Oh,” she muttered. That hadn’t even occurred to her, though it should’ve. Lucius had said he wasn’t sure if the enchantments were specific to Muggleborns, or anyone who wasn’t Pureblood. And if they had children, they’d be Halfbloods.

He slid his hand up her thigh until he snagged her hand. “Sorry. I just—the thought of something terrible happening to you in my house again…I won’t let it happen, Hermione.”
Okay, his concern was fully back to being sweet. She swallowed and squeezed his fingers. “Ron’s brother, Bill, is a cursebreaker at Gringotts. I trust him.”

Draco nodded. “I’ll owl him.”

“Or I can,” she suggested. “I was planning on contacting him and Fleur about the school anyway. I know they want to start a family soon, and Fleur speaks French, so…”

Draco stared, brows pinching together. “I speak French.”

She laughed. “Are you interested in teaching it to a bunch of primary school children?”

It wasn’t that Draco wouldn’t be great with kids, their kids, but she just couldn’t see him having the patience to teach a foreign language to children who weren’t his.

“Not particularly,” he said, frown deepening.

Theo grinned. “Hiring already?”

It was early, granted, but it couldn’t hurt to put feelers out. “Weighing interest. We don’t have real measures to hire by, so we figure we’ll work off of N.E.W.T scores and enthusiasm.”

Draco nodded. “I’m guessing French was my mother’s idea?”

“IT was, but studies show learning a foreign language improves concentration and memory, so I think it’s a good idea,” she said.

“What other subjects do you have in mind?” Theo asked.

She ticked them off on her fingers. “Mathematics, science, history of magic, magical cultural studies, Muggle studies, literature, and French. Oh! And we didn’t discuss it, but I think an arts class would be nice. Fun, you know?”

Draco nodded. “Well-rounded. And you have teachers in mind? Besides Delacour, or Weasley, I mean.”

“Maybe?” She sighed. “It all depends on N.E.W.T scores and interest. I was thinking Dean Thomas could teach science, if he wanted. He’s brilliant with Muggle technology and he’s been working on converting certain gadgets to work with magic. He knows far more physics than even I do.”

Theo stared off into space, nodding slowly. “He puts up with Finnegan who might as well be a child, so clearly he’s a patient fellow.”

Draco smirked at her. “So you’re hiring all your friends, then? Sticking with Gryffindors, or do you plan to branch out?”

“Excuse you, Fleur went Beauxbatons.” She grinned. “One Gryffindor, a pattern does not make.”

He laughed. “Hire Lovegood for art. She can teach the children to make radish earrings and finger paint wrackspurts.”


Maybe he was kidding, but it wasn’t a bad idea. “I think she planned to work with her father at the Quibbler, but I can’t imagine teaching art would eat up all her time. I like it. Thank you, Draco.”
He shrugged, but his smile was soft and proud. “You’re welcome.”

“So, French, art, and science. I’m at a loss for mathematics, honestly. But I was thinking your aunt might be interested in teaching history of magic, what with Teddy attending.” She paused. “And I don’t know about literature, either.”

“What about magical cultural studies?” Draco asked.

She bit her lip, eyes darting to Theo.

Draco’s eyes widened. “That’s perfect.”

Theo shook his head, turning to face them. “What’s perfect?”

“Well, you,” she said, shrugging.

“Why thank you, love, but I’m much too humble to consider myself—” Theo’s jaw dropped. “Wait. Perfect for teaching? Me?”

She nodded. “You know all about customs from the archaic to the more modern. You’ve taught me more about the topic in the past few months than I’ve learned in all my time at Hogwarts.”

He covered his eyes and shook his head. “Love, I’ve taught you about magical polyamory and sex magic, neither of which I’d deem suitable to teach to primary school children.”

Draco covered his laughter with a cough.

“I’m not suggesting you teach that to children, Merlin. But the whole point of the class is to bestow an understanding and appreciation of magical society on the children, some of who will be returning home to Muggle parents at the end of the day. We want to immerse them in the culture and establish empathy, ease the transition and prepare everyone for Hogwarts.” She shrugged. “Besides, children are like sponges. You mention me and you mention Draco and tell them that it’s normal and voila, it’s not weird anymore. It’s much simpler at five years old than eleven, let alone seventeen. And you taught me about courting customs, too. All you have to do is make the lessons age appropriate. Start with, I don’t know, oh! Takeaways and applicable magical lessons from the children’s stories you love and go from there.”

Draco nodded. “You took all the same etiquette classes I did, you know what’s worth learning and what’s antiquated drivel meant to drive children mad. And you can be quite eloquent when you aren’t cursing like a sailor.”


She laughed. “No swearing, that’s true. But I think you’d be good at it, if you wanted.”

She bit her tongue, not mentioning that day, years back in third year when she’d seen Theo giving all his candy away to homesick first years, one of the first memories she had of him.

“I’ve never taught anyone before,” Theo said, lips twisting. “Not really.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “You’ve been tutoring third years in Arithmancy.”

“It’s not encouraged, but I’m allowed to swear in front of third years,” Theo pointed out.

“Just think about it,” she suggested. “It’s nothing you have to decide on right here, right now. And if it’s really not something you’re interested in, fine.”
Draco wasn’t done apparently. “Honestly, Theo, what else do you plan to do?”

He’d never said. Draco had discussed, in loose terms, pursuing a potion’s mastery but Theo had kept rather mum about his plans for the future. Perhaps this would give him some direction like it had her.

Theo swallowed and shrugged. “I’ll think about it, all right?”

They nodded, lapsing into a comfortable silence.

Suddenly Theo laughed. “I suppose you wouldn’t need to pay me. I’m rich enough I could teach for free.”

She bit the inside of her cheek. That fact didn’t hurt, no. And honestly, she’d been thinking the same thing for herself, if she wound up teaching, too. At least to begin with. “I was thinking I might teach Muggle studies. If my N.E.W.T scores are satisfactory, of course.”

Draco scoffed. “Satisfactory? Don’t be absurd.”

“Anything could happen,” she argued.

“Would you like to bet on it?” Draco smirked.

With a start, Theo leaned forward. “We could work together?” He wagged his brow. “I suppose I’d have to refer to you as Miss Granger, wouldn’t I?”

“Hot for teacher?” Draco asked, smirking. “Lucky me, I could have two private tutors at my disposal.”

Theo arched a brow. “Watch it, Mr. Malfoy. Too much cheek and you’ll wind up in detention.”

Certainly not the right tone for teaching primary school, but it was perfect for turning her on. She cleared her throat and lifted her hand in the air. “Perhaps Professor Theo wouldn’t mind giving a demonstration from the book I found in the library.”

Theo grinned.

Chapter End Notes

Next update should be posted within the week. The next chapter is mostly written, but work has me ridiculously busy and I'm on yet another deadline. So, twice-weekly updates aren't possible at the moment, but I can swing weekly ones.

On a different note, I've been toying around with the idea of a sequel. This was always meant to be an eighth-year fic, but it seems like there might be some interest in the primary school/ life for these three post-graduation. So, as a heads up, that's something I'm considering.

Thanks for reading and have a great week :)
Chapter Twenty-Eight

Chapter Notes

A/N: Hey, everyone! Sorry I haven't gotten around to replying to comments on the last chapter. It was either reply to comments or get this chapter posted, so I went with posting. But I read all of your comments and I appreciate them so much!

I ended up splitting this chapter into two chapters because the second half sort of took on a life of its own. I'm currently tweaking the ending of that second half and I should have it posted within the week, roughly. No smut in this chapter (sorry!) but there will be in the next.

Again, thank you so much for taking the time to comment. I'm sincerely blown away by the response to this story. Thank you! The overwhelming consensus seemed to be pro sequel, so I'll be outlining that. I can't promise it will be posted immediately after I finish this fic, but it won't be too long of a wait.

I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Easter holiday had been as exhausting as it had been rejuvenating, leaving her feeling as if she needed a vacation from her vacation. A vacation she was unlikely to get with N.E.W.Ts right around the corner.

Her exhaustion wasn't helped by the fact that for a week she'd been spoiled rotten, sharing a bed with Theo and Draco. Now she was back in Gryffindor tower and they were all the way down in the dungeons, several floors separating them.

Tired as she was, she couldn’t sleep. She couldn’t even get comfortable. Her sheets were too scratchy and the air didn’t smell a thing like cloves and Merlin help her, somehow those two insufferable Slytherins she’d fallen for had gotten her hooked on sleeping with a veritable mountain of pillows. Her single sad lumpy pillow wouldn’t do.

Not to mention there was a throbbing in her chest. It didn’t hurt, but it was terribly annoying, like she was strangely cognizant of some part of herself she usually never consciously thought about. Like when she clasped a bracelet or a watch around her wrist and how all she could think of for several moments was the band against her skin. It was like that, but buried inside her and no amount of time passing acclimated her to feeling.

Rolling over for the umpteenth time, she burrowed her head into said sad lumpy pillow and scrunched her eyes shut. Maybe counting backward would lull her to sleep.


Seventy-six. Seven-five. Seventy-four. Seventy-three. Seventy-two…

Thirty-three. Thirty-two. Thirty-one. Thirty…

Ten. Nine. Eight…
Three. Two…

Bugger.

She sighed and flopped back over, staring up the dark sanctuary of her canopy. Across the room, Ginny was snoring worse than Fluffy the three-headed dog, each inhalation loud enough to penetrate the drawn curtains of Hermione’s bed. Even if she could get comfortable, how in Merlin’s name was she supposed to sleep with that noise? Gods, had no one taught Ginny how to silence her bed?

She wrinkled her nose. No, she was not going to consider those implications. That was Harry’s problem.

Fingers catching on the wand beneath her pillow, she cast a quick tempus. Two-nineteen. She had Potions first block and the last thing she needed was to face-plant into her cauldron.

This wasn’t going to do.

Tossing off the covers, she slipped out of bed, wincing when her feet landed on the cold, stone floor as opposed to her fuzzy slippers. Shuffling slightly to slide them on, she snagged her bag and, as quietly as she could manage, she folded her uniform and tucked it in beside her books. Her robes were draped across the trunk at the foot of her bed and she quickly slipped them on, concealing her pajamas.

Wand in her pocket, bag over her arm, and shoes in hand, Hermione slunk out of the dormitory and down the stairs. The common room was mercifully empty as it should’ve been at such an hour. Even rounds would’ve been long concluded, but still, she passed through the portrait and into the corridor as quietly as she could lest any of the ghosts spot her and give her grief.

She’d just made it to the bottom floor of the castle, was in the homestretch, so close to the dungeons and consequently the entrance to the Slytherin common room when a soft meow sounded behind her.

Bloody Mrs. Norris.

Biting her lip, she ducked around a tapestry. Hiding wouldn’t do much in that she couldn’t conceal her scent, but maybe if she stayed perfectly still and didn’t make another sound, Mrs. Norris wouldn’t pursue the hunt.

The hall was blissfully silent. Her muscles relaxed slowly as the seconds ticked by without another meow or the sound of Filch’s voice. After several moments, she ducked her head out from the tapestry and let out a sigh of relief when the corridor was empty.

All she had to do was make it around this corner and then—

Ow. Pain licked up her arm, the nerves running from her elbow vibrating. In her haste to stop, she’d knocked her stupid funny bone into a battered suit of armor. Her shoes fell to the floor with a graceless, incriminating thud.

Professor McGonagall arched a brow. “It’s awfully late for you to be out of bed, let alone roaming the corridors, Miss Granger.”

Oh Gods, this was mortifying. “Right. Yes, erm, I couldn’t sleep.”

She really couldn’t.
McGonagall hummed. “And so you decided to… go for a walk?”

She had been walking… “The dorms were rather stuffy. I thought a little fresh air might help.”

McGonagall’s lips twitched as she stared down her nose. “Ah. The dungeons certainly do provide an abundance of fresh air.”

She closed her eyes and groaned internally. Merlin help her. “Erm…”

“Miss Granger.” McGonagall paused, lips pursing. “You must be in desperate need of sleep if you cannot muster a better excuse than that on the fly.”

Her cheeks went hot. “That really was dreadful, wasn’t it?”

Of course it was. Here she was, bag slung over her shoulder, shoes in hand and now on the floor, with robes thrown hastily on over her pajamas. She was wearing fuzzy slippers for Godric’s sake. No one went for a walk like that, and certainly no one sought fresh air in the dungeons.

“Indeed.” She nodded. “Dare I say, you fibbed better as a first year. Did you sincerely think I believed you arrogant enough to go after a troll by yourself?”

Hermione sighed. If she couldn’t lie, she might as well be honest. “I really couldn’t sleep, Professor. Ginny snores like you wouldn’t believe.”

McGonagall smiled wryly. “Oh, I believe that. I had the unfortunate pleasure of sharing a room with Miss Weasley at the Burrow, once. Kept me awake half the night.”

She nodded.

“Now, despite the necessity of permitting students to return for an eighth year in circumstances rare and unfortunate as these, there is good reason students generally matriculate for seven years and no more.” McGonagall smiled softly. “You are an adult, Miss Granger, one with exceedingly good judgment. Far be it for me to dissuade you from… getting a little fresh air.”

She blanched. “No, oh no, that wasn’t meant to be an—”

Godric grief, it wasn’t an innuendo. Getting fresh air, Merlin, what did McGonagall think she was up to? Scratch that. She didn’t want to know. It might be a little too on the nose and she wasn’t keen on avoiding the headmistress’s eyes for the foreseeable future.

Professor McGonagall held up a hand. “Good night, Miss Granger.”

She took a deep breath and nodded. “Good night, Professor.”

Hermione took three steps down the hall and paused. “Professor?”

She turned, brows arching over the wireframes of her spectacles. “Yes?”

“I was wondering if I might schedule a meeting with you. Later this week or the next, perhaps?” She shifted her bag higher on her shoulder. “It’s a bit of a long story, really, but I’m working with Mrs. Malfoy and Mrs. Tonks, too I suppose, on opening a primary school. Needless to say, as the first of its kind there are a number of hurdles, the specifics of which I won’t waste your time with now. But I was hoping we could talk?”

With a slight frown, Professor McGonagall nodded. “Certainly. You could join me for tea on Friday. Four o’clock?”
Thank Merlin. She smiled. “Perfect. Good night, Professor.”

“Sleep well, Miss Granger.”

That business out of the way, Hermione hurried the rest of the way to the Slytherin common room. Despite the scare of running into Professor McGonagall, she was nearly dead on her feet. With each step, her eyelids grew a little heavier, and the throbbing in her chest abated.

She reached the stretch of wall leading into the Slytherin commons and paused. As Head Girl, she had knowledge of the passwords to each common room—save Ravenclaw, but she could manage a riddle, certainly—though she’d never used that knowledge. There was a first time for everything.

“Flitterbloom,” she whispered, sighing deeply when the door to the common room swung inward, granting her entry.

Their common room was empty, too, the room filled with a dark, blue-green glow from the lake illuminated by the moon above. For a moment, she stared as the squid swam by. The place was so different from Gryffindor’s common room, but it had a certain appeal.

The door to Draco and Theo’s room was shut, but thankfully not locked. She slipped inside, frowning into the darkness. “Lumos minima.”

A pinprick of light came from the tip of her wand, just enough to see where she was going so she wouldn’t stumble and wake them both up.

“How’s your sleep?” Draco rolled over, squinting into the darkness.

She frowned, sighing. So much for that.

“I couldn’t sleep,” she whispered, setting her shoes and bag down at the foot of the bed. She toed out of her slippers and shrugged off her robes. “Do you mind?”

The corner of Draco’s mouth tilted upward. “Never. I can’t sleep, either. Took Theo ages, but he finally passed out about half an hour ago.”

Theo grumbled into his pillow. “I’m not asleep, but I’d bloody well like to be, so get your cute little arse in bed.” He paused. “Please.”

She set her wand down beside the bed and slipped in beside Draco. The covers were cool, his arm warm as he snuggled up behind her, and the pillows—oh, the pillows. She smiled in the darkness, her eyes slipping shut. Theo tossed an arm around them both, his fingers grazing the sliver of skin left bare when her shirt rode up. Just like that, all the tension in her body bled away, the throbbing in her chest easing entirely. She’d mention it to them tomorrow, though she’d bet good money on it having something to do with this affinity of theirs.

For now, all she wanted was to sleep.

***

It was time to wake up, but Gods, how unappealing.

The arm banded around her waist drew her closer before shifting, a warm palm cupping her breast. She hummed into the pillow, lips curling sleepily. “Morning.”

Draco pressed a kiss just behind her ear. “It’s a very good morning. I hadn’t expected to wake up
with you in my arms.”

“I really couldn’t get to sleep. I counted backward and everything. I was nearly tempted to wander down to the hospital wing and beg Madame Pompfrey for a sleeping draught, but I came down here instead.” She shifted, rolling over to face Draco. His hair was sleep-mussed and falling into his heavily-lidded gray eyes.

Draco smiled, lids slipping and lashes fluttering, even as his brows rose cockily. “I thought you didn’t like the dungeons.”

“I don’t,” she said, matter of fact. “But I happen to like this bed.”

He grinned, nose scrunching. “How about what’s in it?”

“I love what’s in your bed. You’ve spoilt me.” She bit the inside of her cheek.

Draco’s tongue poked against the inside of cheek as he slid his hand down her back, palming her arse. “Oh? Tell me more, Granger.”

“Well”—she walked her fingers up his arm, settling her hand on his shoulder—“it’s embarrassing, really.”

“As if that’s supposed to make me less interested?” He licked his bottom lip. “Go on, I’m listening.”

She cleared her throat. “I’m feeling rather…greedy. Like I can’t get enough.”

His jaw clenched, nostrils flaring, fingers digging into her bum. His eyes locked on hers and for a moment the intensity of his stare made it difficult to breathe. “Enough what?”

Leaning closer, she stopped when her lips brushed against his cheek. “Pillows.”

She drew back and bit the inside of her cheek to keep from laughing at the dumbstruck look splashed across Draco’s face.

His eyes narrowed. “That was underhanded and quite frankly rude.”

A small giggle slipped out. “I’m sorry?”

Moving fast, Draco used his body weight to roll them over until she was pinned beneath him. Arms resting on either side of her, he dipped low until the tip of his nose brushed hers. “You don’t sound sorry.”

No, no she didn’t, but it was next to impossible to fake contrition when she was so pleased with where her teasing had gotten her—beneath him, his hips pressing down against hers, his cock hard against her belly.

When she spoke, it was practically against his lips. “I could make it up to you.”

Draco dropped his forehead against hers and groaned. “You can’t. Not now at least. I let us sleep in.”

Drat. “What time is it?”

With a sigh, Draco rolled off her. “We’ve got half an hour until Potions.”
She jolted, sitting up with a start. “Half an hour? Merlin, we’ll barely have time for breakfast.”

Draco chuckled as she threw the covers off and snatched up her bag, digging for her uniform. Her tie was missing. Perfect.

“Relax, Granger,” he said. “Where do you think Theo is? He’s grabbing us something to eat.”

“Oh.” She threw her skirt on the bed. Maybe she could borrow one of their ties and charm it the proper colors. “Sorry. I feel like I barely slept.”

Draco stood and stretched, arms raised overhead. Suddenly he yawned and aimed a small smile her way. “I know what you mean. Last night was miserable until you showed up.”

“At least you weren’t by yourself,” she said.

Shrugging, Draco crossed the room to his dresser and opened the second drawer. “This is true. But I still felt…I don’t know—”

“Restless?” she offered.

He nodded. “Yes, and I know Theo did, too. Jokes about being spoilt aside, we’d have to be daft to deny that last week altered the state of things.”

Of course it had. Only…“How exactly do you mean?”

Socks in hand, Draco crossed the room and stopped right in front of her. He pressed his fingertips directly to the notch in her sternum, right where that tugging sensation centered. “We talked about it. How it makes you feel when we touch, when we aren’t touching?”

She frowned. “Is it like going through withdrawals or something? Are we going to get sick if we’re too far apart?”

Draco’s face screwed up in confusion. “What? No.” He laughed. “It means I miss you, witch. My magic misses you, and yours mine. It’s the potentiality, our affinity for one another. Enough time spent together in close proximity, intimate proximity among receptive parties, and it creates the facsimile of a bond. Not as stable as one, obviously, but enough that there was a bit of…magical mingling, I suppose? I’m sure if you’d stayed in your bed, you’d have eventually dropped off and within a few days it would be back to normal.”

She bit her lip. Sleeplessness aside, what if she didn’t want things to go back to normal?

“Or”—Draco tipped her chin up—“you could just go ahead and move your things down here and we’d probably all be happier for it.”

She looked down and to the side. “Didn’t you say a bond would only make the feeling stronger?”

It wasn’t that she was avoiding the question, the suggestion that she pack up her belongings and move in, but she needed a moment. She needed to think.

Draco nodded. “To my knowledge—and of course it’s second-hand and mostly from my mother, so I didn’t ask specific questions, mind you—bonding will intensify the feeling ofrightness when we’re close, when we touch. I think my mother was covertly hinting at pleasure, but I’m sure you can understand why I didn’t seek clarification. The bond stabilizes the connection when you aren’t touching, too. Grounding, she said.”
“You told me marriage bonds intertwine magic, tie them together?”

“Right. There’s no exact math to it, no Arithmancy equation to accurately derive the increased capacity for magical strength upon bonding, but magic *can* be strengthened with a bond. It’s like”—Draco pursed his lips—“rope. Braided rope is theoretically stronger than individual strands. But it also allows for greater flexibility, give. That’s what a bond does, assuming there’s the proper affinity between parties.”

“So, if I were to move my things down here, there’d be more inadvertent magical mingling?”

He shrugged. “We spend enough time together that I think the mingling bit’s a given regardless of whether you sleep down here. Last week was even more time than usual, so I suppose if you moved down here, the mingling would likely be more, yes. Does that bother you?”

Only in that they hadn’t discussed what their concrete plans were after graduation, specifically where they’d live. Theo planned to sell his Manor and would quite certainly move in with Draco and she’d—well, she wasn’t too keen on going through another night like the last, certainly not worse. And frankly, restlessness aside, she didn’t *want* to spend a night away from them when the alternative was so appealing. What was the point in restricting herself from what she wanted? Abstinence? For what purpose? There was no honor in that level of self-denial, none that she wanted. Why delay the inevitable?

“No,” she said finally. She took a deep breath. “I was only thinking about what would happen after we leave here. The castle, I mean.”

Draco’s pale brows rose, lips drawing to the side in a smirk. “You mean you don’t want to live at Grimmauld Place with Potter?”

She snorted. “Believe it or not, I’d take your deluded Malfoy ancestors over a screeching Walburga Black any day.”

“Good.” Draco nodded. “Then it shouldn’t be difficult to convince you to move in.”

Had he made that suggestion even two weeks ago, she’d have balked. At that point, her freshest memory—her *only* memory—of the Manor had haunted her. Granted, she was still wary to pass through the section of the downstairs that had once been the drawing room, but she had more pleasant memories to focus on.

Two weeks ago, so much had been uncertain. She hadn’t yet conversed with Narcissa, hadn’t known everything she now did about bonds. She hadn’t told Theo she loved him. She hadn’t spoken with Lucius. Now was different.

The door to the bedroom opened and Theo popped inside before she could answer. “Merlin, you two aren’t even dressed. Hurry up.”

“You have terrible timing, Theo,” Draco grumbled.


Draco rolled his eyes and stepped into his trousers. “I was asking Granger to move into the Manor.”

“Wait.” Theo crossed his arms. “Was that a question at this point? I figured that was an unspoken eventuality. Last week was a trial run, no?”
She huffed. “No. Eventually, perhaps, but no one said anything about when, let alone so soon.”

“Therein lays the unspoken bit.” Theo grinned.

“Come on, Granger.” With nimble fingers, Draco began to button his shirt. “You said it yourself, you don’t want to move into Grimmauld.”

“That is true.” She slipped on her skirt. “Could I borrow a tie?”

Theo opened the trunk at the foot of the bed, rummaged around, and tossed her a spare that she quickly charmed her house colors. As long as no one performed a *finite* on her, she’d be fine. Otherwise, she’d look like a house traitor. Though, if she moved down into the dungeons…

“Think about it. Are you really going to say no to the library?” Theo asked.

“Or my bathtub?” Draco teased.

“Don’t fight it, love,” Theo rounded the bed and quickly knotted the tie for her. “You know you want to say yes.”

Stepping around him, Hermione grabbed her robes and shrugged them on. She snagged a muffin off the bed and paused, hand on the doorknob. With a glance over her shoulder, she smirked. “I know.”

Theo’s lips parted. “Wait, what?”

She shrugged. “I never said I didn’t. But by all means, convince me some more.”

***

Packing up her things wasn’t difficult, not really. Though that might’ve had something to do with the beaded bag with its undetectable extension charm she had led Kingsley to believe she’d gotten rid of, but had casually *forgotten* to destroy. Whoops.

Even without her bag, she didn’t have much to pack. Just her clothing, some of which had long since migrated down to the dungeons, a few knickknacks and assorted odds and ends including photos, and of course her books. Her books would’ve required several trips, but thanks to her bag with its never-ending depths and its feather-light charm, she was able to make one trip and she was done.

Running into Ginny in the common room took up more of her time than packing had.

“Hermione,” Ginny greeted. “I didn’t see you yesterday.”

She nodded. “We didn’t Floo into the Three Broomsticks until late.”

“We? So you really did it? You spent the break at Malfoy Manor?” Ginny asked.

It looked like Ginny had gotten the note she’d left at Grimmauld after all. “I did.”

Ginny opened her mouth and then shut it. She grimaced. “I’m trying to do this whole thing where I trust your judgment, but Merlin, you spent the week there *willingly*?”

She laughed. “I did.” Glancing around to check for prying eyes and eavesdropping ears, Hermione pulled Ginny into the far corner of the common room. “Don’t pass out on me, but after graduation? I’m moving in.”

“I am.” She reached into her satchel for her beaded bag. She flashed it at Ginny. “And right now? I’m moving downstairs.”

She held her breath as Ginny processed it all. After a moment of stuttered blinks, Ginny dropped her voice. “Harry told me they released him early. Lucius Malfoy.”

Not what she wanted to talk about. She braced herself. “They did.”

“You saw him?” Ginny blanched. “Oh, fuck, Hermione. And you stayed? You’re moving in? No offense, but you really have gone mental, haven’t you?”

She wasn’t going to bother defending Lucius Malfoy to Ginny Weasley of all people. No, that was a pointless endeavor if there ever was. “He’s…confusing. But I don’t feel like I’m in danger, Ginny. I wouldn’t be moving in if I felt uneasy about him, about any of it. And Draco wouldn’t have asked.”

Ginny rubbed her temple and sighed. “You realize no one in my family will ever visit you there, right?”

“You realize I’m not welcome at the Burrow, right?” she retorted.

“Mum will get over herself in time.” Ginny batted the air as if waving the thought aside. “Ron’s got a date with some girl. I guess she’s the administrative assistant to the Head of the DMLE, so I’m optimistic it’ll happen sooner rather than later. Besides, it’s not that you’re not welcome, Mum’s just got her arse on her shoulders. She can’t ban you, she’s just—”

“Dead-set on making me uncomfortable when I’m there? She told me there was no room for me to stay.” She shook her head. “Never mind your mother, no offense. I’m moving in and eventually I think—”


That was…not something she’d put any thought into. But Ginny had a point. Nott-Malfoy sounded terrible. “Let’s not get ahead of ourselves. My point was, I don’t see this ending any time soon.”

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“If ever?” Ginny asked.

She bit the inside of her cheek and nodded.

Ginny blew out her breath, ruffling her hair. “Gods, okay. I still don’t like this. That’s probably not helpful, sorry. It’s just ingrained into me to be contrary about anything and everything Malfoy. It’s bred into us Weasleys, I swear. I’m working on it, but…”

Ginny shook her head and pasted on a smile that looked more like a grimace. “Congrats, Hermione. I’m really happy for you.”

She snorted. “Thanks, Gin. It’s progress. I thought you were going to hate me forever when I first told you back in January.”

Ginny wrinkled her nose. “They kind of grow on you. Like mold, so I don’t like it, but it is what it is. Malfoy’s a prat but he’s got good taste in Quidditch, I suppose. And Nott…well, I can grudgingly respect anyone who comes up with a hex better than my bat bogies. That vomiting hex is going down as the stuff of legend. And they make you happy, so…” She trailed off with a shrug
and small smile.

“You’ll visit then?” she asked.

With a roll of her eyes, Ginny sighed as if put out. “Right now I’m more concerned about seeing you again for the rest of the year, Hermione. You’re moving into the dungeons?”

“I’ll still come around the common room,” she promised. “I’m not mental now, but I can’t sleep and if I can’t get a decent night of sleep I will go spare. I just…it if you had the opportunity to spend every night with Harry, you’d take it, wouldn’t you?”

Ginny nodded. “Fair enough. Speaking of which, Harry and I talked and I think I’m moving into Grimmauld this summer.”

Ew. “That’s…great.” She smiled.

Ginny snorted. “It’s a miserable place, but we’ll clean it up. Get rid of the doxy infestation, figure out how to unstick Walburga from the wall, dust the place, brighten it up. We’ll make it a home.”

Hermione waggled her brows. “A den of sin, you mean. What’s Molly going to say about the two of you living together out of wedlock?”

“Sin is such a Muggle concept, Hermione.” Ginny rolled her eyes. “Mum’s going to throw a fit and probably drop a million hints that are anything but subtle about Harry making an honest woman out of me.” She smirked. “Not that I’m opposed, mind you.”

“I’m happy for you, Gin,” she said. “You and Harry.”

“Thanks.” Ginny arched a brow. “By the way, pot calling the cauldron black, much? You’re shacking up with two blokes, that’s double the debauchery.”

Hermione laughed and shook her head. Ginny didn’t know the half of it. “Walk with me?”

“As long as you promise to make time for me this weekend.” Ginny led the way to the portrait door. “I know we’ve got N.E.W.Ts coming up, but you can spare an hour for me.”

Chapter End Notes

On a totally different note, I'm outlining a different, shorter fic to work on between finishing this and starting on the sequel. It's a Sirius/Hermione fic, so I 100% get that not everyone will be on board with that pairing, but I did just want to drop that in for those who are interested to be on the lookout in the next few weeks :)
A/N: Hey everyone! Apologies for the delay, but I hope this chapter makes up for it. This chapter includes a scene that is quite possibly the smuttiest thing I’ve ever written so... *runs and hides*.

I hope you enjoy!

Miss Granger,

I hope this letter finds you well.

Regretfully, as much as I’d love to acquiesce to your request for access to the Book of Admittance, I simply cannot, not without proceeding through the proper channels. If you wish to file a formal request for access you can do so by contacting the Registrar within the Department of Magical Education.

Best wishes with your upcoming exams,

Kingsley Shacklebolt

Minster for Magic

Ministry of Magic, Great Britain

Dear Miss Granger,

The Department of Magical Education, Ministry of Magic, Great Britain has received your request. You can expect to receive a decision regarding your request on or before the 19th of March, 2002.

We value your patience.

Charlotte Tingleton

Official Registrar for the Department of Magical Education

Ministry of Magic, Great Britain

Kingsley,

As per your advice, I submitted an official request to the DME. I can expect an answer in March of
2002. That simply won’t do, not when time is so precious, especially in an undertaking such as this, the establishment of a primary school, the first of its kind. Several of the children we might hope to educate will be at Hogwarts by the time an answer is received, and quite frankly, my hopes of receiving a positive response at this juncture are so low I’ll be in need of a sturdy shovel to dig for them.

Further, I cannot name the last time you referred to me as Miss Granger. Frankly, I’d be shocked if I wasn’t so hurt. We fought alongside one another, or did you forget?

Hermione Granger

Order of Merlin, First Class

Head Girl, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Perpetual Thorn in Kingsley Shacklebolt’s Side, Presumably

Hermione,

I want to help, you must understand, but do you realize the red tape involved in granting someone who isn’t employed by the Ministry or Hogwarts access to the Book of Admittance? Requests for such access are usually lodged years in advance and even then, ninety-five percent of cases are denied outright. The five percent of cases wherein which access is granted pertain to the tragic occurrence of orphaning of young witches and wizards who are of squib heritage and their subsequent magical guardianship. Furthermore, I must be frank. As much positive weight as your name carries, the name Malfoy carries a similar weight in a very different direction.

Sincerely,

Kingsley Shacklebolt

P.S. Merlin, is this informal enough for you?

Kings,

May I be frank?

You owe me.

I’m calling it in.

Hermione

P.S. There was a trial. Narcissa and Draco were exonerated, as you very well know. Might I suggest you get over it?
Hermione,

I suppose I should’ve expected that when you called in your favor, it wouldn’t be for something simple like a job within the Ministry. On that note, shall I go ahead and break the news within the DOM and DMLE? They jump at the mere mention of your name; best put them out of their misery, no?

Consider permission from the Ministry granted for one, Hermione Jean Granger, to access the names inscribed in the Book of Admittance for a period of five years. I’m pushing through the paperwork as we speak, though, you’ll still need to seek permission from both the Headmistress and the Board of Governors. I imagine you’ll have no issue with the former. Best wishes with the latter.

I assume you’ll be in attendance at the Remembrance ceremony on the 2nd of May. Not to trade favors, but might I endeavor to request your presence at the Midsummer Gala? Without sounding trite, your attendance would be mutually beneficial. A golden opportunity to drum up interest in this primary school of yours, perhaps?

On that note, I’ve been reliably informed to upgrade your plus one to a plus two. If that sweetens the deal.

Warmest Regards,

Kingsley Shacklebolt

Minister for Magic

Ministry of Magic, Great Britain

P.S. Are you sure you weren’t originally meant to be sorted into Slytherin? You’re ruthless, woman.

She rolled her eyes and tucked the missive into her bag. Golden opportunity? Merlin, the Minister had spent too much time with the Public Affairs liaison and now the poor man sounded like an advert.

The gist of the last letter was decent, even if all the ones leading up to it had been tiresome and headache-inducing. More than decent, in truth. He’d pushed through Ministry authorization to access the Book of Admittance. Granted, she’d have preferred indefinite access, but she wouldn’t look down her nose at a five year approval period. That was hopefully long enough to garner sweeping support for the school and perhaps even secure two or three—maybe four, if she was terribly lucky—years of successful schooling that would speak for itself.

As for the Headmistress’s access? Already granted three weeks ago. Narcissa was working diligently on the Board of Governors and she was hopeful that she’d have secured enough votes by the time the Board would gather for their end of term meeting. There were a few stubborn holdouts making life difficult, but there was time. According to Narcissa, everyone had a price, and the only barrier to success was figuring out what that price was, and either fulfilling it or exploiting it.

In all her experience, she wouldn’t argue against that logic.
The list of hurdles they’d have to cross was shrinking by the day. Thank Merlin for small favors. In
addition to Kingsley, she’d also heard back from both Bill and Fleur; Bill was happy to pop by the
Manor and take a look at the enchantments, and Fleur was intrigued by the position she’d been
offered. She and Bill were looking to start a family soon, she’d said, and so the primary school was
of particular, personal interest to them both.

All that left, really, was preparing for N.E.W.T.s, a task she’d thrown herself into with a steadfast
determination to succeed. She’d lost track of how many hours she’d spent holed up at her favorite
table in the back of the library, but the lights had already dimmed, a sure sign it was approaching
curfew.

“Thought I’d find you here, tucked away in your little corner of the world.”

She smiled down at her book, but didn’t lift her head. “Careful. I’m cross with you, Theodore.”

Theo leaned against the table at her side and hummed. “Is this an apology that calls for sugar
quills, a donation of ludicrous wealth to a worthy cause, or orgasms?” He dropped his hand smack
dab in the center of her book, obscuring her view. “Please say orgasms.”

She pushed his hand aside, lifted her head, and shut the book with a snap. Theo winced. “You lied
to me.”

His blue eyes narrowed. “When?”

She had to bite the inside of her cheek. “This bloody book. I distinctly remember you telling me it
would get interesting after chapter twelve. Needless to say, it hasn’t.”

His lips curled slowly, the anxiety in his eyes rapidly replaced with relief. The dimple in his cheek
spelled mischief. “Hmm, a matter of perspective, perhaps. I distinctly recall you acting like a sexy
little swot and telling me it was boring because I didn’t properly understand it, just as I also
distinctly remember you nearly hexing me. Perhaps you knocked me off balance with your
aggression and I didn’t know what to say.”

She arched a brow. “I did no such thing.”

His jaw dropped. “Yes, you did. You drew your wand.”

“Not that.” She grinned. “I didn’t knock you off balance. That’s ridiculous. You knocked me off
balance. Coming into my library and sauntering up to my table all charming and off-limits—and
flirting with me.”

Theo chuckled ruefully and lifted a shoulder. “Okay, I did do that. But you underestimate your
hold on me, love. You made that comment about turning over a new leaf. It was the first time I let
myself hope the year might go well, the first time I had hope for well”—he bit his lip—“I never
hoped for this. Dreamed, maybe. But it was the first time it felt like the past could be just that. I
had to lie down when I left the library. Draco found me in our room utterly flummoxed.”

“I’d have paid good money to see that.” Her heart did that silly thing where it slowed for a beat
before thundering quickly.

Theo sighed. “You’ve ruined me, by the way. I’m a disgusting romantic now and you’re utterly at
fault.”

She had to cover her mouth to keep from laughing too loudly for the library. “Me? I’m hardly at
fault. If anything, Draco’s rubbed off on you. Don’t make a joke.”
His lower lip jutted out, pouting.

She tossed her hair over her shoulder and reached for her potions’ textbook, gently cracking open the spine. “It’s not my fault you’ve gone soft, Theo.”

He cut his eyes. “Soft. I said I was a romantic, witch, not a teddy bear. I still want to do really dirty things to you. Wicked, depraved things you have no idea about, things I’ll have to probably wait years to muster the courage to even suggest to your not long-ago-virgin ears. Possibly acts that are illegal in Britain, but I’m sure they’re legal in France. Or they were legal, once upon a time, maybe.”

She hummed and dropped her eyes to her book, feigning apathy while squirming inside. “And to think, I’ve yet to even receive any rug burns.”

“Merlin, woman.” Theo laughed. “You realize you’re practically begging me to bend you over my knee, right? Show you exactly how not soft I can be when pushed?”

Her face flushed as a distracting heat pooled between her legs. She cleared her throat. “I’m studying.”

Trying to study at least.

Theo tsked. “You’ve been in here going on four hours. I think you’re done, love.”

Gods was she torn. She didn’t feel finished studying for the day, but whatever Theo was offering was tempting…

She bit her lip and lifted her eyes. “I just really want to do well.”

With a soft smile, Theo shut her book. “You will. But half of studying is retention and retention calls for resting that brilliant brain of yours.” He pressed off the table. “Come on. Let’s go back to the room and I’ll take care of you. You won’t have to think for a while, or at least, it will be absurdly difficult for you to have a coherent thought if I have my way. Besides, I have it on good authority I owe you orgasms for fibbing.”

Too tempting an offer to refuse. She swept her books into her bag and stood. “So you admit it, you fibbed?”

Theo took the satchel from her and shouldered it. He wrapped an arm around her waist and grinned as he led her through the library and into the corridor. “Oh, definitely. Single most bloody boring book I’ve ever had the displeasure of reading. Thank Merlin you agree, otherwise I’d be seriously worried your masochistic streak was wider than I could handle.”

“Shush.” She pinched his side. “We’re in public.”

He rolled his eyes. “There’s no one around.”

“You never know who’s lurking,” she said. “Peeves could be right around the corner for Godric’s sake. Do you know what he’d do with that information?”

Theo tossed his head back and laughed.

He didn’t get a handle on himself until they were at the entrance to the common room. He took a deep breath and spoke the password.
“I’m glad you find my possible embarrassment and torment at the hands of a troublemaking ghost hilarious,” she huffed.

Theo tugged her over the threshold and past the common room full of focused students. Well, focused until they caught sight of who had entered. Half the students readily turned back to their studies, and the other half stared. Glared, more like.

It wasn’t as if she hadn’t been in and out of the Slytherin common room with increasing frequency since January, but now that she was a permanent fixture? The younger students were easiest to adapt, but the older students? Half seemed unimpressed with her, and the other half glared, likely because she’d snagged two formerly off-limits and highly lusted after heirs to ancient houses…or for that whole business with being who she was, Muggleborn and friend to Harry Potter, and most assuredly part of the reason why several of their family members were in Azkaban or on house arrest or…dead. Though, it was probably the former seeing as most of those who glared were girls, years six and up. No one had said anything beyond the pale, so she ignored them. Two months and they wouldn’t even be on her radar.

Upon entering their room, he locked the door and smirked. “I wouldn’t let Peeves torment you. I’d sic the Baron on him.”

“Chivalrous.” She rolled her eyes.

He dropped her satchel and grabbed her hips, walking her backward. The trunk at the foot of the bed had been moved to its regular resting place beside the dresser, so the path was unobstructed. Her knees hit the mattress and she leaned into the fall, catching herself on her elbows.

Theo stepped back and lifted a hand to his chin. His blue eyes were dark, contemplative and appraising as he stared with the full intensity of his focus. “Let’s see…why don’t you be a good girl and strip?”

She swallowed against the lump of nervous excitement in her throat that no matter how many times she was with Theo, or Draco, or the both of them, never entirely went away. She wasn’t nervous, but they knew how to keep her guessing in a way that left every interaction fresh. Never could she imagine getting bored. Merlin, no.

Lifting her hands to her tie, she loosened the knot and slipped the fabric free from her collar. With a small grin, she tossed it at Theo who snatched it from the air and pocketed it.

He smirked. “Leave your socks on.” He cocked his head. “Skirt, too.”

Her cheeks prickled, face flushing so severely that her head felt light. “That’s…”


Her fingers trembled as she slipped the buttons on her shirt free. She slid the cotton off her shoulders, untucked it from her waistband, and let it fall beside the bed. Her breeches followed, her nipples pebbled in the cool air. Theo’s gaze was hot as she crossed her left leg at her knee and tugged off her shoe, repeating the process with the other foot.

She shuffled further back on the mattress and shifted to her knees. Taking a bracing breath, she reached under her skirt and wiggled her knickers down her thighs, over her knees, and off her feet.

“Those are mine.” Theo reached out, wiggling his fingers.
Gods. Swallowing hard, she balled up her dark blue knickers and tossed them to him. Like her tie, he caught the fabric mid-air. Only this time, he studied what he held. Her insides practically trembled when he crushed the fabric to his nose and inhaled deeply. “I was hoping you’d have soaked these by now.” He pocketed the knickers and shrugged. “I guess I’ll have to work a little harder, won’t I?”

Not really. What he was doing was working perfectly…except he’d barely touched her. He could do that and she wouldn’t complain. “Touch me.”

Theo cocked his head, considering.

She swallowed. “Please.”

After a moment, he shook his head, lips twitching. “No, I don’t think I will. Not yet. I think I want to watch you touch yourself.”

“Theo.” She huffed.

He chuckled darkly. “Go lay back against those pillows you like to pretend you don’t adore and get comfortable.”

With another frustrated sigh, she did as he asked, crawling backward and settling in at the head of the bed.

“Comfy?” Theo asked. He’d stepped closer and had taken a seat at the foot of the bed, the perfect spot to watch…or at least get a perfect upshot view of what was under her skirt.

She nodded.

“Good.” He smiled. “Now pull your skirt up and spread your legs. I want to see that pretty little cunt.”

If she wasn’t wet enough for his taste, she had to be now. Flushed all the way down below her breasts, she grabbed the hem of her skirt and drew her knees apart until she was on display.

Theo’s eyes darkened as he stared. “Fuck, you’re gorgeous. All puffy and pink. Spread your lips.” She bit the inside of her cheek and reached down, doing as he requested. He groaned softly. “And dripping like dew on petals.” He smirked. “You have no idea what I plan to do to you and it’s driving you spare, isn’t it?”

She swallowed, her mouth impossibly dry. “Yes.”

“I’ll make you a deal,” Theo offered, reaching for his own tie and loosening it slightly. “While you touch yourself, I’ll tell you what I have planned. How’s that sound?”

The only thing that would make it better would be if Theo was the one touching her while he spoke. “Fair enough.”

His tongue darted out, wetting his bottom lip. “Good. And by the way, love? Don’t you dare come.”

She bit back a huff and got on with it, fingers lightly circling her clit, soft enough to feel pleasant, but not enough to put her in danger of approaching the edge she wasn’t allowed to fall over.

Theo shifted, adjusting himself in his trousers. “Let’s see…after I watch you play with yourself—
which, by the way, you can do better than that—I plan to fuck you until you’re begging me to make you come.” His lips quirked. “Not to ruin the surprise, but I’m not going to let you.”

Seriously? “Theo.”

He arched a brow. “Did I tell you to stop touching yourself? No. I want to see you fuck yourself with your fingers. Two of them. Go on.”

His voice was working against her. Low, a little rough, and so bloody bossy, his words were going to be her ruin.

Following his instruction, she abandoned her clit and parted her folds.

“Wait,” Theo said. “Give me your hand.”

He reached out, gesturing with a wiggle of his fingers for her hand. She extended her arm and he leaned forward, licking up the length of her index and middle fingers, making them wet with his spit. She bit back a moan at the feel of his tongue tickling her skin.

He grinned. “Now you may proceed.”

Thighs quaking, she ran her fingers through the moisture that had gathered at her entrance. *Wet* didn’t do her state of arousal justice. Biting her lip, she slipped those two fingers into her cunt and held them there for a moment, savoring the feeling of—not quite feeling full, but no longer empty.

Theo groaned. “Gods, I don’t know what’s better—the way your eyes just rolled back and how your lashes fluttered, or the sight of you with your fingers buried in your cunt. Fuck, Hermione. The things you do to me are categorically unfair.”


Theo smiled. “Yeah? Tell me. Fuck yourself and tell me about it.”

She withdrew her fingers and thrust them back in, flushing severely at the slick sound the movement made. Theo’s smile went feral.

“I—you make me stupid,” she blurted.

Theo threw his head back and laughed. “Impossible, but the sentiment is appreciated. Even I don’t hold that kind of power.”

She couldn’t get the right angle to press against the nerves that would light her up inside, but maybe that was a good thing. She couldn’t forget how she wasn’t supposed to come. “Weren’t you supposed to be telling me about what you’re going to do to me? You stopped with not letting me come.”

“Right.” Button by button, Theo removed his shirt. Then he dropped his hands to the placket of his trousers, popped the button, lowered his zipper, and freed his cock. He stroked himself twice. “Then I’m going to finger that tight little arse of yours until you beg me to fuck it.”

Her breath caught, the movement of her fingers faltering. “Are you going to?”

His left brow arched. “*Am* I going to?”

Gods. She nodded. “Yes.”
She wanted it so badly she couldn’t see straight, was struggling to pull the requisite air into her lungs to keep from passing out. From the way Theo’s nostrils flared and his jaw clenched, he wanted that, too.

“Keep touching yourself. I want you desperate,” he instructed, standing.

She had passed desperate minutes ago, but she didn’t say that. Instead, she kept up a steady pace, thrusting her fingers and curling them, close but not close enough. Each time she thrust, the heel of her hand pressed against her clit, and that was what nudged her nearer to the edge. “I just want you.”

Theo paused, pants halfway down his legs. He smirked. “You’re sweet. You don’t know what a privilege it is to dirty you up.”

He dropped his pants the rest of the way, stepping out of them. Then he prowled up the bed, holding himself aloft over her. With one hand, he snagged her wrist and lifted her hand. Her face went hot when he stared at her slick fingers, and it went absolutely feverish when he licked up the length of them, his tongue cleaning up her arousal. “You taste like heaven, you know that?”

She opened her mouth, fully planning on telling him how silly that was, to tease him for being the sweet one, but the words died on her tongue when he dropped her hand and grabbed her leg, opening her up and with one quick thrust buried himself inside her.

His unreasonably long, dark lashes fluttered as he groaned softly. He blinked his eyes own, his gaze pinning her to the pillow. His Adam’s apple bobbed. “Magical folk don’t have really have gods, you know? Not in the Muggle sense, at least. But I swear on my magic that being inside you is as close to a religious experience as I’ve ever felt.” His lips curled deviously. “And Draco, too, but he doesn’t need his ego inflated so let’s keep this between us.”

It was a heady, intoxicating feeling, being compared to something holy, but she knew what he meant. He hadn’t even needed to say the words; he worshipped her, worshipped her body, and Draco did, too.

Nothing she said then could’ve done his confession justice, so she rolled her hips and tensed her muscles, squeezing him. Theo choked out a laugh and dropped his head to her shoulder, kissing the skin there.

He hadn’t been joking about fucking her until she begged. A plea was on her lips in short order, Theo’s thrusts measured and hard, but not fast enough. “Theo.”

He lifted his head and rested his forehead against hers, his breath fanning hot and sweet against her mouth. “You know what I want.”

His voice was rough, not breathless but close. He wasn’t the only one affected by his teasing.

She tilted her head, brushing her lips against his. Or meaning to, at least, because Theo pulled back before their mouths could touch. At the same time, his hips slowed, thrusts gentling. She whimpered. “Please.”

Theo closed the distance and brought his mouth down to hers. His teeth nipped at her lower lip, and she couldn’t help it when her knees drew up, cradling his hips tighter, pulling him closer, drawing him further into her.

He slowed the kiss, lips grazing hers tenderly. “Please what? What do you want?”
She was too far gone to be modest. Giving Theo was he was asking of her was too sweet a prospect. “I want you in my arse. Please.”

Theo rolled his hips, hitting that spot perfectly. “Fuck. What did I do to deserve you?”

She kissed him quiet, pouring as much sincerity as she could into the movement of her lips against his.

After a moment, Theo drew back, separating their mouths and lower halves, leaving her woefully empty. He shuffled backward on his knees. “Roll over, love. Hands and knees.”

She did as asked, shifting slightly to get comfortable. Unexpectedly, there was a fluttering in her stomach that spoke of nerves she hadn’t anticipated.

When Theo’s hand settled on the curve of her bum, she jolted slightly.

“Nervous?” he asked.

Swallowing over the lump in her throat, she nodded. “It’s silly, but yes.”

“Not silly,” he said. “Unnecessary, yes, but normal. Though I’ve touched you here before.”

He ran his fingers down her crack, making her shiver.

“I know,” she said. “That’s why it’s silly.”

Theo hummed. “Problem is, you’re thinking too much.”

Out of nowhere, his palm came down hard against her rear, the crack of his hand against her skin loud.

“Ow,” she gasped, bum tingling.

Theo paused with his hand on her heated cheek. “Bad ow?”

Had it not been for the heat working its way from her arse and settling between her legs, she might’ve laughed at the uncertainty coloring his voice. She cleared her throat. “Unexpected…but no, not bad.”

Theo rubbed her skin, the lingering sting dissipating into nothing but a memory. “I need you to be honest with me, Hermione. If you didn’t like it, I swear I won’t do it again. It won’t hurt my feelings and I promise I won’t be disappointed.” He huffed briefly. “Okay, pause. As lovely as your arse is to look at, something tells me we should be looking at each other when we talk about this.”

She shifted her weight and shuffled on her knees until they were facing. The crests of Theo’s cheeks were uncharacteristically flushed, his blue eyes bright and nervous as they darted over her face. “So.”

She cleared her throat. “I told you I wanted it.” Granted, it had been weeks ago when they’d been back at the Manor, but she hadn’t changed her mind. “It took me by surprise, but I’m not complaining. It—it made me wet, at any rate. I—I liked it. At least I think I did. Sample size was rather small.”

Theo bit the swell of his lip. “Do you want me to spank you again?”
“Yes,” she said. “I do.”

Theo nodded. “All right.”

Without needing to be asked, she shifted back over to her hands and knees, once again presenting him with her bum.

His hand smoothed over the skin of each cheek. He took an audible breath in and then his palm came down, smacking the right cheek this time. Fuck. She groaned at the sting and wiggled her hips, heat dancing on her skin.

Once again, Theo rubbed her cheek. “How was that?”

She stopped squirming and adjusted her weight on her knees. “Gods, Theo.”

He chuckled softly. “I need more than that, love.”

“Good,” she assured him. “Again?”

“Again,” he agreed, no longer sounding so bloody anxious. “Wasn’t too hard?”

She shook her head. “No.”

“You’ll tell me?” he asked.

She dropped down to her elbows, the position steadier. “I’ll tell you.”

Another deep breath preceded the smack of his hand. His pause was briefer that time, another smack raining down on her other cheek.

Her bum was warm, radiating heat that spread. Her legs were too far apart to rub together, but she could feel liquid evidence of her arousal pooling between her lower lips.

Theo delivered four more smacks before he massaged her bum, the touch of his skin against hers driving her up the wall.

“Theo,” she whimpered his name.

The bed shifted and suddenly his tongue was there, licking her from where she was dripping all the way up her arse. He focused there, circling her rim, gently spearing her with the tip of his tongue until her stomach clenched and her elbows shook against the mattress.

“Please,” she muttered.

Theo kissed the skin where her arse met her thigh. “Ready for more, love? I’ll give you whatever you bloody want. I’ll give you the fucking world, just ask.”

Her breath quivered in her throat. “I want you inside me.”

She needed it, needed his weight on top of her, his cock pressing into her, filling her.

“Don’t go anywhere,” he said.

As if she would. She kept her face buried in the cradle of her arms as Theo rustled around in the bedside table. He returned in quick order, his hand sweeping gently down her back. “Try to stay relaxed for me, yeah?”
“Okay,” she agreed.

His finger was slick as it pressed against her, slipping inside with relative ease. They’d done this before, Theo’s plan to prepare her for his cock a patient one spread out over weeks. She’d taken two of his fingers, so this was nothing new.

It was slightly new when Theo tugged gently against her rim, stretching her gently as he added another finger. “Still good?”

“Yes,” the s turned into a long hiss when Theo thrust his fingers into her and wiggled them slightly, stretching her inside as much as he had her rim.

Theo chuckled softly. “You sound like a snake.”

“Suppose I’m in good company,” she said, licking her lips. “I really want you inside me.”

He hummed. “All right. Roll back over for me.”

She paused. “On my back?”

He snorted. “Look, love, I’ll shag you rotten like this next time, I promise. Right now, if I can’t look you in the eyes, I’m going to lose my mind, yeah?”

And he argued that he wasn’t sweet? He was delusional. She bit back a smile and rolled over. “Better?”

“Perfect.” He grinned. “Plus, this way I can look at your tits, too.”

She laughed. “Shut up and shag me, Theo.”

He arched a brow.

“Gods, shut up and shag me please.” She rolled her eyes.

He nodded. “Gladly.”

Slicking his length with more lubricant, Theo then tucked himself close between her thighs, kneeling between her legs. His cock nudged against her and he took himself in hand, hips tilting as he pushed against the resistance of her hole. “Bear down for me, love.”

Her face was hot, her stomach fluttering as she followed his directions. The head of his cock slipped inside her, making her inhale sharply through her nose.

Theo paused. “All right?”

Different, but good. “Keep going.”

Pressing lightly against the back of her thighs, Theo held her open and gained the traction needed to slide the rest of the way inside. He paused again when he was fully seated inside her.

Full was accurate and she couldn’t have said with any honesty where she ended and Theo began. It was a touch overwhelming.

“You can move,” she whispered.

Theo shook his head, jaw tense. “Need a minute. I’m liable to embarrass myself if I move right
now.”

She bit her lip. “Good?”

He nodded. “Not to be crass, but your arse is so tight I think you might tear my cock off.”

She snorted. “Sexy.”

“Not too long ago I confessed that being inside you is akin to nirvana, cut me some slack.” He huffed. “I’m trying not to come. I’d expire from shame.”

She hummed. “Do you need to think about Quidditch scores or something?”

He groaned. “No. That’ll make me think about Draco in his Quidditch kit.”

“Oh Gods.” She didn’t mean to laugh, really. “Sorry, that’s true. He looks good in it, doesn’t he?”

“He looks edible.” Theo dropped chin and sighed. “Fuck, you’re no help, especially not when you laugh. I can feel it, and it makes your tits shake. Plan B.”

“Plan B?” she asked.

He brought his hand between her thighs and pressed his thumb against her clit. “Plan B.”

She didn’t know what Plan A was, but she really liked Plan B. Theo circled her clit, his touch quick and firm. When she gasped at the speed with which she approached her climax, Theo finally drew back a bit, thrusting gently, his cock brushing against nerves so different from the ones she was accustomed to, but that she quickly found herself increasingly fond of.

Her back arched against the sheets, bowing as the tension within her snapped. She trembled through it, a whimper she couldn’t restrain slipping from between her lips as warmth flooded her veins. Theo followed her over the edge, hips jerking and going still, his face pinched with pleasure.

“Fuck.” He groaned, hands stroking down her thighs all the way down to her sock-covered calves. “That was almost embarrassing.”

She bit her lip and held her breath as he withdrew. There was no pain, but her hole felt intensely used in ways she wasn’t used to. “It was amazing.”

Theo collapsed against the bed beside her and tugged until she curled against his chest. “Yeah?”

She nodded and stroked the delectable indent over his hip. “Really. Besides, I know you’d have gotten me off, regardless.”

He hummed, sounding utterly spent. “I would’ve. My pride would’ve been utterly battered and bruised, but I’d have probably made up for it by getting you off until your eyes crossed.”

She laughed. “Here you have me feeling like I got the short end of the stick.”

Theo scoffed. “Love, there is nothing short about my stick.”


“What? Gods.” He laughed. “Get your head out of the gutter. My wand is nearly fourteen inches. What did you think I was talking about?”
“You sincerely expect me to believe you meant that?”

Theo shrugged, his shoulder shifting beneath her head. “Do you?”

“Not a chance,” she said.

They both froze when, across the room, the doorknob jiggled.

Theo shifted and she reached for the sheets. “Who is it?”

“Draco. May I come in?”

Theo flopped back against the pillows and she halted in her pursuit to half-heartedly cover herself. “You don’t need to ask.”

Theo hadn’t bothered to ward the room beyond a basic locking spell that Draco was able to _alohomora_. He paused in the doorway for a moment before shutting the door behind him and relocking the door. Leaning against it, Draco took in their naked—and her, well, half-naked—forms. His eyes darkened and the edge of his mouth curled upward in a smirk. “I’m not interrupting, am I?”

Theo chuckled. “We’re done.” His hand swept against her back. “Why don’t you tell Draco what we did?”

Draco arched a brow, but she rolled her eyes. “I’m sure Draco knows what we did.”

If their nudity wasn’t obvious, the room probably reeked of sex.

Theo tsked. “That just means I have to show him.”

Quickly, he flipped up the hem of her skirt, exposing her bum. Her skin was still hot, making the cool air of the room seem even chillier.

Draco’s brows flew up into his hairline. “Sweet Salazar, Granger, I’m not sure which is redder, your blush or your bum.”

She buried her face in Theo’s chest when they both laughed.

Draco’s footsteps were quiet, but not silent as he approached the bed. When she opened her eyes and lifted her head, Draco was beside the bed, staring down at her with a smile. “Why are you all shy? Because Theo reddened your arse?” His expression went contemplative. “You didn’t do something naughty and get punished, did you?”

“No.” She huffed. “Of course not.”

The mere idea was ludicrous and a bit insulting.

Theo chuckled. “Of course not. No, she needed distracting.”

Draco arched a brow. “From?”

Theo turned his head and with two fingers, lifted her chin. His lips brushed against the shell of her ear. “You don’t mind talking about this right?”

_Minded_ was the wrong word. It made her squirm, not because she was uncomfortable, but because…Gods, she hardly knew why. It turned her on, that was for certain. Doing something was
one thing, talking about it something else entirely. It felt distinctly naughty, discussing it all.

She shook her head. “No. I’m fine. You can tell him.”

Draco probably needed to know, anyway.

Theo grinned. “Can I show him?”

Show him—oh. Theo’s fingers teased the top of her crack and suddenly she was absurdly aware of how she was leaking. She dropped her head to his chest and struggled against the urge to hide her face. The only thing that kept her from clenching her eyes shut was that, based on previous conversations, it would turn Draco on. “Yes.”

“Show me what?” Draco asked, curiosity coloring his words.

Theo smoothed his hand over her bum and down her thigh. He grabbed her knee and pulled it over his body, spreading her open and leaving her on display.

Draco’s eyes dropped to her arse and widened, darkening subtly. “Fuck.”

She squirmed under the attention, making Draco snap out of it. He shook his head and grinned. “So you let Theo bugger you and come inside your arse? Dirty girl, Granger.”

Sweet Merlin. “I didn’t let him do anything.”

Theo laughed. “No, you begged for it.”

“I asked,” she argued. “Nicely.”

Draco’s grin hadn’t dropped, not one bit. “My statement stands. Dirty girl.” His brow rose. “Generally speaking, dirty girls need to get clean.”

Now wasn’t the time to tease her with a bathtub all the way in Wiltshire. “No offense, but I don’t plan on getting out of bed for at least another hour.”

Draco shrugged. “That’s fine. I wasn’t planning on you going anywhere.”

He reached out, deftly turning her onto her stomach. Then he grabbed her hips and yanked them up and—

“Oh my Gods, Draco.” She whimpered as Draco’s tongue swept through her folds up to her arsehole, making an eager meal out of her.

From the head of the bed, Theo smirked. “Honestly, love, you’re the one who said you didn’t want to leave the bed for at least another hour.”
“And…quills down, everyone.” The proctor at the front of the Great Hall smiled placidly. “I do hope the exam was neither too nasty nor exhausting.”

Weak laughter rippled throughout the hall. The joke wasn’t particularly funny, but after a week of grueling examinations that were nasty and exhausting, most students would laugh at just about anything, Hermione included.

With a flick of her wand, the proctor levitated the exams and summoned them toward her where they landed in neat stacks atop the staff and faculty table. She nodded briskly. “Splendid. As the charms’ N.E.W.T was the final exam on the schedule, on behalf of the Department of Education within the Ministry of Magic, it is my supreme honor to congratulate you all on completing your N.E.W.Ts. Well done!”

Someone in the back of the hall whooped loudly, setting off a cheer that persisted even as the students filtered out of the hall and into the corridor.

“How do you think you did?” Ginny rolled her eyes. “Never mind. Piece of cake for you, wasn’t it?”

Hermione shrugged. “I don’t know. The last question didn’t bother taking into account that vinegar is produced by the oxidation of ethanol and is, therefore, a reversion and not a transformation making the entire concept—”

“Shut up.” Ginny held up her hands. “No offense, but bloody hell, Hermione, I could not give less of a shite at this point, okay? We’re done.” She shook her head, her braid whipping from side to side. “Done! No more exams, no more classes, no more, never again. I relinquish you from ever needing to explain charms to me. And you can include potions and transfiguration and…Gods, all of it, in that moratorium. I don’t need a mastery level understanding of anything academic to play Quidditch. All I need to know is how to fly a broom.”

“Fly it well, you mean.” An arm banded around Hermione’s waist as Draco sidled up beside her.

Ginny scoffed. “I fly better than you, at any rate, Malfoy.”

“In your dreams, Weasley,” Draco said, but he smiled, softening the taunt.

“In yours, ferret.” Ginny grinned brightly.

Draco smirked. “False. My dreams are pleasantly occupied by this one here.” He squeezed Hermione to his side in a rare public display that made her flush. “And Theo, too. So you can see, my sleeping hours are busy enough without you intruding. Though, need I remind you who won the Quidditch cup this year?”
Slytherin had bested Gryffindor in the final match, securing the cup, much to Draco’s satisfaction. There was the chance that some of that satisfaction might’ve had to do with the very personal congratulations she and Theo had given him in the Prefects’ bath later that evening. Just thinking about that night was enough to make her blush from the tips of her toes to her scalp, the memory of Theo with his hand wrapped around Draco’s neck as he took him hard and fast from—

Merlin, now was not the time or place to be thinking of that.

Ginny wrinkled her nose. “I could’ve gone my entire life without hearing about your sordid dreams.” She shivered. “Yuck.”

“I never said they were sordid.” Draco shrugged. “It’s not my fault your mind resides in the gutter.”

“Whose mind is in the gutter?” The scent of cloves filled her nose seconds before Theo pressed a kiss to the top of her head.

“Yours,” Draco said, grinning cheekily.

Theo laughed. “Duh.”

Ginny stuck out her tongue. “And on that note, I’m gone. See you at the feast?”

She nodded. “Of course.”

“We’re having a party in the common room later, too. I’m sure everyone will turn a blind eye if you drag these two with you.” With that, Ginny turned and ducked around the corner, disappearing from sight.

“So.” She turned, facing them both. “How’d you do?”

Theo shrugged. “Easy. That last question was bullshite but—”

“Yes! Wasn’t it? They didn’t even both taking into account—”

“Oxidation?” Theo nodded. “Utter tripe. Whoever wrote that should be ashamed.”

“Do you ever stop and ask yourself how you got here?” Draco smirked. “For instance, I can’t help but wonder how I got tangled up with two absolute swots.”

“How’d you get so lucky, you mean?” Theo arched a brow. “And are you telling me you didn’t take offense to that question?”

“Of course I did, but I’m not going on about it.” Draco grinned. “Hence, swots.”

“You love it.”

“Never said I didn’t.” Draco tucked his hands into his pockets and rocked back on his heels, his casual demeanor affirming the fact that he didn’t really mind.

Theo brushed a curl away from her forehead before it fell into her eyes. Her hair was escaping the confines of her bun at a rapid rate, tendrils curling around her face like Devil’s Snare. She’d battled it throughout the exam and had been sorely tempted to plaster it all to her head with a solid sticking charm. She probably would’ve had it not been for the fact that wands were banned during the written portion of testing.

“And you?” Theo asked. “What did you think of the exam, aside from that last imbecilic
Altogether, it hadn’t been awful. For the most part, she felt confident about her answers, but there was that little sliver of uncertainty lurking in the back of her mind whispering that she’d flubbed something up along the way no matter how prepared she’d been. “I think I did all right.”

A look passed between the two before Draco laughed. “Outstanding, then.”

Theo smirked. “Ob-viously.”

She shoved his arm. “Quit. Your impression of Professor Snape is eerie.”

Draco cast a look around the hall. Most students were congregated in small groups, many laughing and celebrating, far fewer frowning and commiserating, and even less concealing teary eyes and running noses. Slowly, students began to disperse and disappear until the racket in the hall fell to a subtle chatter rather than a raucous cheer. “What now?”

If she wasn’t mistaken, he sounded a little wistful. Then again, maybe she was projecting.

“We still have the Leaving Feast tonight,” she said.

“In four hours,” Theo said.

Hermione yawned and then smiled sheepishly. “Sorry.”

“Tired?” Draco asked. His hand swept a path from the base of her neck down to the small of her back before repeating the circuit.

She nodded. “A bit.”

As if contagious, Theo yawned, too. “I could use a nap, quite frankly.”

“You just want to cuddle,” Draco teased.

Theo shrugged, not even abashed in the slightest. “Guilty.”

Draco led the way down the hall in the direction of the dungeons, his hand on the small of her back.

“It’s odd, isn’t it?” she asked after a long moment of silence.

Theo hummed. “What’s odd?”

Draco slipped his hand beneath the hem of her shirt and traced an abstract pattern against the small of her back. She leaned into the touch, shivering slightly at the feel of his cool fingers against her bare skin.

“Being done,” she said. No more classes, no more exams, and no more revising. No more patrolling, no more staying in the library until Madame Pince booted her just before curfew. After tomorrow, there would be no more receiving owls in the Great Hall, no more Halloween feasts, no more ghosts popping up through tables, no more…just—no more. “We’re leaving tomorrow and we’ve never coming back.”

Maybe it was silly, but her eyes stung, her nose burning. Hogwarts had been her home since she was eleven, her home away from home at least. She’d made her first friends here, her best friends here, had her happiest moments and her worst alike. She’d laughed within the walls of the castle
and mourned, shed blood and tears in near equal measure, and lost her innocence in more ways than one. She’d fallen in love, not only with Draco and Theo—definitely with those two—but also with magic, with this cruel and beautiful world and she wouldn’t have traded any of it, not for anything.

“We’ll be back.” Draco kissed her forehead. “Not as students, but there will always be the annual Remembrance ceremony.”

A bitter taste filled her mouth. The Remembrance ceremony, Gods. She’d expected it to be a painful, gut-wrenching affair and it had been that and more. Kingsley had read the names of all those who’d given their lives, had their lives stolen—everyone from Cedric in fourth year to all those lost in the final battle. Each name read aloud had been a dagger to the heart, a reminder of those who had fought and perished so that everyone else might go on, might live in a world better than the one they’d left.

It had been a somber affair, but also a reminder of the promise she’d made to herself at the beginning of the year. She’d vowed to face it all, the pain and struggles, her fears and heartache, all of it, head on, but also to live, to seize every moment of happiness she could so that one day when the time came, she’d leave this world with as few regrets as possible.

All in all, she liked to think she’d accomplished that and more thus far, had lived beyond her wildest dreams.

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“Treacle tart?” Theo offered.

She shook her head, one hand pressed against her stomach, the other lazily dragging her fork through the remnants of caramel sauce streaking her plate. “I can’t do it. I’m stuffed.”

Theo leaned down, lips brushing her ear. “Not yet you aren’t.”

“Theo.” She shoved his shoulder and pinned him with her best glare, which in all honesty was a little weak, but she couldn’t be bothered to try harder. Not when she was full and pleasantly warm and happy beyond measure.

He chuckled and straightened, reaching around her to offer his plate to Draco. “You want it, Draco?”

Draco gestured to the apple pie on his plate and shook his head.

“I’ll take it off your hands. Thank you,” Ginny said, already scooping the tart from Theo’s plate onto hers. That would be her second tart on top of a piece of pie, two biscuits, and her actual supper.

With a shrug, Theo set his now empty plate aside. “Will it get me hexed if I ask how you eat that much food and don’t look like…well, like it?”

Ginny grinned around her fork. “Magic?”

Everyone chuckled and for just a moment Hermione paused. If someone had told her on the first day of the year that Theodore Nott and Draco Malfoy would one day be sitting at Gryffindor table across from Luna Lovegood and Ginny Weasley with Neville Longbottom seated on Draco’s other side, that Theo would be joking with Ginny and not running away with bat bogies zinging from his
nose, that Neville would be offering Draco a flask of firewhisky in hushed tones, she’d have not believed it, not for one second.

“Oi, Neville, you’re planning on sharing with the rest of us, yeah?” Ginny pointed at the covert flask operation happening beneath the table.

“Share? I’m not sure I know what you’re talking about, Ginny,” Neville said, ears pinking. “You can have the rest of my pie if you want it.”

Theo slid his glass down the table. “Please and thank you.”

Neville nodded and tucked the glass of pumpkin juice beneath the table.

“Neville.” Ginny pouted.

“Be a little less conspicuous and give the man a glass,” Theo said.

Hermione cast a look around the room. “Should we really be—”

“Yes.” Ginny nodded. “You need to loosen up and by that I mean remove the wand from your arse and drink up, Hermione. N.E.W.Ts are over, classes are finished, we’re graduates and furthermore, we’re adults. Adults who deserve to get a little sloshed.”

“Thank you for that very kind assessment.” She rolled her eyes. “If you’d have let me finish, I was planning on asking if we should be doing this in the middle of the Great Hall or if we should hold off on breaking out the contraband substances until we’re in a common room.”

Ginny smiled sheepishly. “Whoops. Old habits. I forget you’re a rule-breaker these days.”

Draco arched a brow. “Hasn’t Granger always been a rule-breaker?”

“Alcohol and staying out past curfew is rather tame compared to some of your previous exploits if my understanding is accurate.” Theo grinned.

“Oh, it’s accurate,” Neville said. “Did she tell you about the time she put me in a full body-bind curse first year?”

Theo’s lips curled upward in a devious smirk. “That sounds awfully—”

A quick pinch to the inside of his thigh made him jolt and cut off whatever inappropriate thing he was about to say.

He glared at her, but it lacked any of the heat of true anger. “Advanced for a first year.”

Neville laughed. “She told you about the polyjuice potion?”

“Setting Snape on fire?” Ginny chimed in.

“Breaking Sirius out and flying on the back of a hippogriff?” Neville laughed.

Ginny snorted. “A fugitive hippogriff at that.”

“Can we not talk about the bloody hippogriff?” Draco muttered, cheeks flushing.

“Illegal use of extension charms?” Neville mused.
“Breaking into Gringotts?”

“Flying on a dragon?” Luna added, smiling dreamily.

“Okay!” Hermione held up her hands. “That’s enough of that. We all get the picture. I’ve broken many rules, yes.”

“Wait, hold on. Go back.” Draco turned to her, grey eyes wide and jaw slack. “You set Snape on fire?”

“His robes, not his person.” She huffed. “And it was just a little fire. It got snuffed out nearly immediately and I had a good reason for doing it. I thought he was cursing Harry, you see.”

Draco shook his head slowly. “Just a little fire. Sweet Salazar, remind me to never get on your bad side.” He smiled and ran a knuckle down the length of his nose. “Never again get on your bad side, I mean.”

Theo cleared his throat. “I think what Draco is trying to say, love, is that you’re a beautiful goddess of loyalty, justice, and retribution and you have no bad side.”

“Kiss arse,” Ginny teased.

Under the guise of pressing a kiss to her jaw, Theo whispered, “I’ll do plenty more than kiss it.”

The room was suddenly several degrees warmer, her face an inferno. Avoiding Ginny’s all too knowing eyes, Hermione nudged her glass down the table. “Actually, Neville, I’ve changed my mind. Please share.”

Theo kissed her once more, everyone else laughing lightly. After sufficiently doctoring her drink, Neville passed Draco her drink, and he set it down in front of her plate with a smirk. He dropped his voice. “Careful. This is stronger stuff than wine. Who knows what sorts of confessions you might make this time?”

She was never going to live that one drunken night down, not that she minded too terribly.

“Hermione, how are the plans for the school coming along?” Luna asked.

She took a hearty sip of firewhisky spiked pumpkin juice before answering. “Fairly well. We still have a few holdouts on the Board of Governors, but I have plans to rectify that soon.”

“Rectify that soon?” Ginny shivered. “You’re a bit scary, you know that?”

“How is that scary?” she asked.

“I mean, we were just talking about your track record of setting people on fire,” Neville said.

Ginny pursed her lips. “What was that Muggle film Sirius made us watch? The Godfather? Are you going to make someone an offer they can’t refuse?”

Merlin. “One person, one time. That’s not a track record. That’s not even a pattern, it’s a single instance.”

“You put Rita Skeeter in a jar,” Ginny said.

“Blackmail, impersonation, robbery, arson…” Theo ticked off on his fingers.
“Don’t forget general mischief-making,” Luna added. “Really, Hermione, are there any rules you do adhere to?”

“Honestly.” Ginny snorted. “Don’t you feel a bit like a hypocrite, docking points when you patrol while knowing you’ve done worse?”

She rolled her eyes. “Did you all get together and decide to pick on me tonight?”

“Never.” Theo wrapped an arm around her waist. “We’re simply celebrating your many varied accomplishments.”

“Anyway, the preparations are on track. We simply need to take care of the holdouts and secure a location for the school. September will, unfortunately, be too soon to open the doors, but maybe we could aim for a half-year and begin classes in January? Otherwise, it will be the following autumn, which, all things considered, isn’t too terribly long a time when you think about when we first set everything in motion,” she said.

“Perfectly reasonable.” Beneath the table, Draco took her hand and laced their fingers together.

“Luna, you’re planning on teaching, aren’t you?” Neville asked.

She nodded. “I am. Father doesn’t plan to retire just yet, so he doesn’t need me to take over the Quibbler. I think teaching art should be plenty of fun.” Her smile waned, her brow furrowing softly. “You should make sure to plant yarrow near the doorways and windows of the school to keep the fairies away. What a mess it would be if they replaced the younger children with changelings during nap time.”

Eight years of knowing Luna and all her…quirks had still somehow not prepared Hermione for that suggestion. Apparently, no one knew what to say because the table fell silent.

Slowly, Draco nodded. “Right, stolen children. That sounds like a lawsuit waiting to happen.”

Luna hummed. “And fairies are terribly talented at litigation. Best put an iron nail in the doorframes, too.”

“Better be safe than sorry,” Theo muttered beneath his breath.

“Indeed.” Luna smiled. “And we can always make twine dolls with button eyes and set them outside to confuse the fairies. That can be the first assignment.”

“Right.” Hermione nodded. “We’ll…do that.”

Luna cocked her head and looked thoughtful. “You should probably consider planting yarrow outside your manor, too, Draco. Fairies are particularly attracted to children with fair hair. If you have children, chances are the fairies will be very drawn to them. It doesn’t help that you have a nargle infestation. Unless you’ve gotten rid of them since the last time I visited?”

Draco grimaced at the reminder of the last time Luna had been inside the manor. “I’ll relay that to my mother. Thank you.”

Theo leaned in. “Erm, fair hair, you said?”

Luna ran her fingers through her own flaxen strands and nodded. “Oh, yes.”

Theo looked like he was about to say something else, so Hermione nudged him lightly with her
knee and shook her head. Best not to unravel that thread any further.

Ginny cleared her throat. “So. Who else is on board? Fleur, right?”

“Fleur agreed, yes. And Andromeda. Dean’s teaching science,” she said.

A ways down the table, Dean looked up at the sound of his name. Across his cheek was a streak of fudge sauce. “Huh?”

“For the love of Merlin, wipe your face, Dean,” Ginny chided, lips twitching.

Dean grabbed his napkin and swiped it over his face, grinning sheepishly. “Talking about the primary school, eh? Professor Thomas has a nice ring to it, doesn’t it?”

“You’re letting any old riff-raff in, aren’t you, Hermione?” Seamus joked.

“Must be,” Theo said. “Seeing as she wants me to teach.”

“I don’t know how many times I have to tell you you’ll make a wonderful teacher, Theo,” she said.

Ginny held up a hand. “Hold on. I’ve been meaning to ask this but I keep forgetting. If Dean’s teaching science, does this mean he’s going to be required to teach”—she paused, brows raising—“sex education?”

The whole table groaned.

Seamus snorted and opened his mouth, but before he could say anything Dean reached out and slapped a hand over the lower half of his face. Cheeks dark, Dean laughed nervously. “No. I mean… I won’t, right? Hermione?” The color drained from his face. “Fuck, tell me I don’t.”

The idea was laughable. “Definitely not, Dean.”

“Right.” Dean nodded before pausing. “Wait, should I take offense to that? Definitely not?”

Ginny balled up her napkin and threw it at his head. “Do you want to teach reproductive science to ten-year-olds?”

Seamus finally wiggled himself free from Dean’s grasp and with a gasping breath blurted, “He’ll try to tell them about cock wrappers.”

Draco spit out his drink, spraying the table with pumpkin juice. “Excuse me, cock what?”

“Condoms.” Dean groaned. “Condoms, Seamus. For Christ’s sake, they aren’t cock wrappers.”

Seamus shrugged. “I don’t care what you call it, that’s what it is. You asked me to wrap my dick up in some weird rubber come-catcher. It’s not natural, I say.”

Ginny grabbed her sides, howling. “I’m dying. Oh my fuck, a come-catcher. That’s brilliant, Seamus.”

Theo cleared his throat. “Hermione?”

Draco turned, staring at her with wide, wary eyes.

Merlin help her. “Condoms are a Muggle contraceptive and disease prevention… device. It’s a latex sheath that”—what did she do to deserve having to explain this?—“rolls down over the penis and
prevents the transmission of…fluids.”

Theo blinked. “It literally is a come-catcher?”

Seamus snorted. “It is!”

Dean groaned. “How in the world was I supposed to know magical folks don’t use them? Then this one looks at me like I’d grown another head.”

“No,” Seamus said, shaking his head. “I looked at you like you’d just asked me to roll a piece of rubber wrap over my dick. It was a right shock, let me tell you. I know it’s a bit of prize, but it doesn’t need a gift bag.”

Theo leaned in, whispering in her ear, “This is a thing? You’re not pulling one over, are you?”

She shook her head. “Muggles don’t have contraceptive spells or potions, obviously, so they have condoms and birth control pills, shots, and implants that either prevent ovulation or fertilization. Or both.”

“How unfortunate,” Theo muttered, looking bothered. “I haven’t been this thankful for magic in ages.”

It made life easier in a multitude of ways, that was for certain.

“Regardless, Dean won’t be teaching sex education. Basic biology, sure, but we’ll leave the sex education for the heads of houses here,” she said.

“How was that, by the way? Sex education with Professor Snape?” Ginny asked, eyes flashing with curiosity as her gaze bounced between Draco and Theo. She dropped her voice. “I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, and put a stopper up your—”

“Ginny!” she shrieked.

Draco smiled. “Much like potions class. Direct and to the point.”

“And with an emphasis that none of us dunderheads needed to be reproducing anytime soon,” Theo said.

“Professors Flitwick and Sprout joined forced to teach Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff. Professor Flitwick referred to it as making love and Professor Sprout used a nice pollination analogy. It was lovely,” Luna said.

“McGonagall threatened to tan our hides if we got anyone in the family way,” Neville said, blushing. “But that was nothing compared to the talk my Gran gave me.”

Ginny nodded briskly. “Mum’s talk was the worst. I love her dearly, but she’s a bit of a hypocrite, preaching to us all about the importance of saving ourselves until marriage. Anyone with half a brain can count back and see Bill was born four months after Mum and Dad’s wedding.”

“Bet she’s loving you shacking up with Potter,” Draco teased.

Ginny rolled her eyes. “She’s in denial, I think. She probably won’t believe I’m moving out until I actually start hauling my stuff through the floo.”

“Do you need help packing?” Neville asked.
She shook her head. “Nah, I’ve got it. But we’re having a bit of a housewarming slash moving party. I’m hauling my things in and Hermione’s moving her stuff out of Grimmauld. You’re welcome to join.”

“A bunch of Weasleys under the same roof as these two? Even for a few hours?” Neville nodded his head toward Draco and Theo. “I wouldn’t miss it.”

“Ha ha,” Draco deadpanned. “Some hero you are, making light of my misery.”

Neville grinned. “Remember, that’s my firewhisky you’re drinking, mate.”

Draco lifted his glass in a salute. “You’re a good man, Longbottom.”

Surreal was the best way of considering the look that flickered in Neville’s eyes. “You aren’t half bad yourself, Malfoy.”

Of all the ridiculous things to choke her up, it was that, proof that her life wasn’t going to be forever split in two—Theo and Draco, and her friends—and that things could be good and happy and whole, not just for her, but for everyone she loved.

She sniffed hard and bit the inside of her cheek. Ginny kicked her under the table and tilted her head in question. Hermione shook her head, smiling.

“Everything all right?” Theo asked.

His eyes were bright and curious, his smile soft and fond. Beside her, Draco continued to banter with Neville, and maybe he did it without thinking about it, but he squeezed her fingers as if in a gentle reminder that he might not have been looking at her, but she was still on his mind.

She nodded, returning Theo’s smile.

Everything was perfect.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: Apologies for the delay. My grandfather passed away unexpectedly and writing has been pretty much the last thing on my mind. I really appreciate everyone's patience and I promise the next update (which will be the epilogue, eek) won't take so long. Expect lots of fluff, smut, and a set-up for an eventual sequel.

Although there will be one more update, I do want to take a moment to thank all of you from the bottom of my heart. Your comments, kudos, subscribes, etc. constantly make my day. Each time I get a notification, I seriously grin so hard. So, thank you x10000 for giving this story a shot and sticking with it.
Epilogue

A/N: Hey guys! First off, I want to thank you all from the bottom of my heart for your kind words and condolences. The past couple of weeks have been rough, but your comments have brightened my days. I appreciate them more than I can say, truly.

I'm happy, and a little sad, to say that with this update we've reached the end of S&S, but there *will* be a sequel. I'll likely begin posting some time in late spring as I want to have several chapters written and reserved first.

This epilogue is nearly ~11k words of pure fluff and smut, I suppose fitting for a story that was mostly fluff and smut all along. So, grab something to drink, get comfy, and I hope you enjoy! 😊

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“It’s not too late, you know.”

Hermione paused, setting her folded jumper aside. “What’s not too late?”

Arms crossed, Ron nudged one of the packed boxes with the toe of his boot. “Plenty of things. You could still change your name, enter the protected person’s service, move to…I don’t know, Guam?”

“Guam?” she asked, lips twitching. “Why in heaven’s sake would I move to Guam, Ron?”

Ron groaned. “It’s Malfoy Manor. Anything beats that.”

She tsked. “Stop it. I’ll have you know, Narcissa did a lovely job—”

“Redecorating, yes, you’ve said.” He wrinkled his nose. “Doesn’t mean I’m keen on visiting you there.”

“Too bad.” Setting a stack of jumpers in the trunk, she shut the lid and triple checked the closet. That was the last of her clothing, the last of…all of it. “You promised.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Ron scratched the back of his neck and shrugged. “Just want to make sure you’re sure. You are sure, aren’t you?”

More than anything. “I am. I swear.”

Ron sighed and nodded his head at her trunk. “That the last of it?”

She wasn’t bringing much, didn’t have much to bring that she hadn’t already dropped off straight from Hogwarts. Just some clothing, a few keepsakes that fit in two boxes, and her books. All her books, granted, but together, they’d be able to haul it all through the Floo in one trip. It was so little that it wasn’t even worth it to shrink it down. A good thing, seeing as they were all achy and exhausted from hauling Ginny’s many belongings through to Grimmauld all morning. Unlike Hermione, moving her things had taken multiple trips, and Molly had only gotten more distraught.
with each box and trunk took through the fireplace. Uncomfortable was putting it lightly, uncomfortable in more ways than one. Poor Neville was laid up in the spare bedroom, sleeping off a pain draught after pulling a muscle in his back from overdoing it.

“That’s it.” She nodded. With a flick of her wand, the trunk lifted and floated through the door and down the stairs ahead of them.

“—and so fairies like blonds?” Harry’s head was cocked to the side as he goggled at Luna who simply nodded.

Across the room, Theo—who’d learned better—shook his head and made an abrupt gesture in front of his throat, mouthing the words, “Cut it out.”

“Oh yes. Changelings are nearly always fair-haired,” Luna replied, none the wiser to Theo’s actions.

Harry opened his mouth, shut it, and tried again. “Luna, no offense then but do ever wonder—”

“All finished!” Hermione interrupted. “How are things down here? Everyone’s getting along?”

From the far end of the sofa, with one ankle crossed casually over his knee, Draco snorted. “No one’s been maimed if that’s what you’re asking.”

“Yet,” Harry added, smirking slightly. “No one’s been maimed yet.”

Draco rolled his eyes. “You talk a big talk, Potter, but don’t act like you didn’t invite me to play pick-up Quidditch.”

“The Department of Mysteries’ seeker disappeared,” Harry protested. “If they don’t have a substitute next week, our game’s forfeit.”

“Doesn’t negate the fact that you needed a seeker and you came to me. I’m doing you a favor.”

Harry scoffed. “It’s not a favor. If anything I’m doing you one by inviting you to play. Did you stop to think I invited you because I know I’m better than you?”

“Interesting. Let me get this straight, either you’re afraid of a challenge, or you need me.” Draco smiled. “It’s one or the other, take your pick.”

“Afraid of a challenge?” Harry stared, open-mouthed, green eyes wide with disbelief. “Did you forget who you’re speaking with?”

Draco shrugged. “Methinks thou doth protest too much, Potter.”

“Methinks,” Ron repeated. “Who says that?”

“It’s called culture, Weasley,” Draco said, brushing invisible dust from his trousers. “That thing you get from opening a book and—”

“Excuse me,” she interjected. “An Unspeakable is missing and you’re arguing over Quidditch?”

And Shakespearean English, apparently.

Harry, Ron, and Ginny stared as if it were completely normal.

Ron shook his head. “No, we know where the bloke went, we just can’t get him back.”
Harry coughed and glared at Ron. “But you didn’t hear that from us.”

“Oh, come on, Harry.” Ron groaned. “No one here’s going to the Prophet.” He cut his eyes in Draco’s direction. “Right?”

Draco scoffed. “As if I’d need to sell a story to the Prophet. Please.”

“Out of curiosity”—Theo leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees—“where did this poor bastard end up?”

Harry’s lips twisted. “When, not where. When did he end up.”

“Time turner incident gone awry.” Ron grimaced.

“And no one’s doing anything?” she asked. Merlin, the poor wizard was stuck in time and they were concerned with replacing his Quidditch position? Already?

Harry and Ron shared a look and Ron shrugged. “That’s…classified?”

When Harry nodded, she rolled her eyes. Classified, her arse. “Oh, please. And the Ministry is doing what exactly? You are doing something, aren’t you?”

Ron frowned. “Not much for us to do exactly. Not the DMLE, at least. Hasn’t been a crime committed.”

“Sure you don’t want to join the DoM?” Harry joked. “Whip them into shape?”

Draco and Theo spoke at the same time, “No.”

Their concern was sweet, but she had zero interest working for the Ministry, especially after that sales pitch. “Thank you, but as I’ve already told Kingsley a million times, no.” She paused. “Honestly? Hell no.”

Harry chuckled. “All right, Headmistress Granger. Everything packed? We can always move you out tomorrow if you’d rather wait.”

“What’s the rush, really?” Ron nodded.

Draco pulled a face. “And be forced to make small talk with you two days in a row? I think not.”

She laughed, flicking her wand. “I’m sure we can manage it if you’d rather stay behind, Ron.”

Ron sighed. “No, no. I’ll…help.”

He looked as if he’d been offered a bogey-flavored Bertie’s Bott’s Every Flavored Bean, part offended, but mostly just ill at the thought of stepping foot back inside the Manor.

“I’ll come,” Luna offered, standing and smoothing down her skirt. “I can show you where best to plant the yarrow, Draco.”


Luna hummed. “Does it?”

Draco looked at her askance. “Yes?”
“Oh, good.” Luna smiled and nodded. “I wasn’t sure if you were just being kind.”

Ron snorted indelicately. “Malfoy? Kind?”

“Now, I haven’t said a single disparaging word about your hair or your general, bumbling disposition.” The set of Draco’s jaw was harsh, but his eyes danced. “I’ve shown kindness in spades, Weasley.”

“Tosser,” Ron grumbled, rolling his eyes.

Theo unfolded himself from the couch and stretched, his shirt rising and revealing an inch of smooth, pale skin that made her bite her lip. Gods, it had been a long day and it was over yet. Theo cracked his neck and smirked. “Quit flirting with my boyfriend, Weasley.”

Ron turned an unnatural shade of red to rival his hair, his freckles disappearing altogether as he gaped. “I’m—what the—I wasn’t—no. Not if he was the last bloke on Earth.”

“Interesting”—Ginny hummed—“that you said if he was the last bloke in the world and not the last person. Something you’d like to share with the class, Ron?”

His ears were purple, he was that flushed. “As in, I’d take all the girls first and if push came to shove, the rest of the guys before him. Not that I meant I like—you know what, Ginny? Watch it, or I’ll tell Mum all about the times I covered for you and said I was staying here when I wasn’t.”

She yawned and stretched out against the cushion Theo had abandoned. “That ship has sailed, brother. You think Mum honestly believes I’m sleeping in a spare room?”

Ron wrinkled his nose. “I’d like to think you’re sleeping in a spare room, thanks.”

Hermione sighed. “This is nice and all…whatever this is, but would you all mind? I’d like to unpack before it gets too late.”

“That eager to be rid of us?” Harry joked.

As if that deserved a proper response.

Rolling her eyes, she grabbed the box of books beside her feet and called over her shoulder, “Someone toss the powder for me, will you?”

Stumbling from the Floo, she waited for the others to join her on the other side. First came Theo, then Harry, Ron, Luna, and finally Draco stepped from the fireplace.

“Merlin,” Ron muttered. “This is—”

“Nice,” Harry blurted, head tilted back as he took in the mural covering the ceiling. “Really nice. Erm, brighter than I remember.”

Luna smiled. “You’ve gotten rid of the Nargles since the last time I visited.”

Draco grimaced at her mention of their last visit and adjusted the box in his hands. He jerked his chin at the doorway. “Please.”

Ron and Harry whispered as they brought up the rear of their ragtag group, the bunch of them winding their way out of the room and up the stairs. Luna prattled on to Draco about the doorways they should line with onion juice to keep away something she referred to as gulping plimpies, and only the occasional furrowing of his brow belied his discomfort as he otherwise nodded and
hummed at the appropriate intervals.

Theo sidled up beside her and nudged her with his elbow, his hands otherwise full. “Look at us all playing nice. Before you know it we’ll be having dinner parties and organizing play groups.”

“Play groups?” She arched brow. “Don’t get ahead of yourself.”

He chuckled. “I haven’t the slightest clue what you’re insinuating, but I was talking about Draco and Harry.”

“Theo.” She bit her lip, laughing.

“All I’m saying is I about had to pinch myself when Potter invited him to the game next week.” He shook his head, blue eyes wide with exaggerated disbelief. “Thought I was hearing things.”

She nodded. “I’m surprised Draco agreed.”

“Eh.” Theo shrugged. “He’s probably looking forward to the opportunity to best him once more.”

“Misses it, does he?”


“Whatever’s harmless that makes him happy,” she corrected. “It’s all fun and games until someone falls off a broom from a mile in the air and breaks a neck.”

She pursed her lips. An outrageous sport, one she thought she’d put behind her once and for all seeing as Draco was talented, certainly, but a professional career wasn’t quite in the cards for him, not that he’d ever expressed a desire to pursue one. But no, Harry had to go and be nice. Not that they were any better off—or safer—as enemies, but Quidditch? Honestly? Why couldn’t they bond over something safe, like a Muggle sport? Like…golf? She huffed.

Theo nudged her once more. “Okay?”

“Just a bit tense, I suppose. Long day.” She rolled her neck from side to side, stretching.

Between hauling boxes and dealing with Molly’s—well, Molly in general, not to mention the general overwhelm of having all her friends together, plus Draco and Theo, she was ready to call it a day.

Theo’s lips curved in a sinful little smirk that made her flush tip to toe. “As soon as everyone’s gone, I’ll help you work out your kinks, yeah?”

Behind them, Ron groaned. “Blegh. Top of the list of things I don’t need to know.”

“Don’t listen then, Weasley,” Draco said, rounding the corner and stepping inside their room.

“As if I wanted to overhear that,” Ron muttered, making her cheeks burn.

“You can just set those down anywhere.” She lowered her own box to the floor and straightened, smiling. “Thank you all for your help.”

“‘course.” Harry nodded and slid his glasses up the bridge of his nose. His gaze bounced around the room, carefully drifting over the bed before he refocused on her. “You need a hand unpacking?”
She shook her head. “No, it shouldn’t take too terribly long. But thank you.”

“Sure.”

For a moment, they all stood awkwardly in the center of the room eyeing one another, no one making a move other than to shift their weight from one foot to the other or tuck their hands inside their pockets.

“This is bizarre,” Ron blurted.

Harry shot him a look of exasperation. “What Ron means is, you living here will take some getting used to.”

Ron shook his head. “Sure, Harry.”

“I’ll visit and you’re welcome here whenever you’d like,” she said.

Draco tucked his hands inside the pockets of his trousers and coughed. “Within reason. And only if you owl ahead first. Don’t think you can just wander through the Floo at any hour of the day and night and put your feet up whenever you please.”

Theo pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed. “What he means is, we’d like to be ready for guests. Tilly would be cross if she weren’t adequately prepared for entertaining.”


“You know”—Luna swung her arms at her sides—“it would be much easier if everyone said what they meant and meant what they said. Or, if obfuscation is your intention, maybe try speaking in a different language altogether. Might I suggest Akkadian? No one speaks Akkadian anymore.”

Draco blinked as if Luna were already speaking in a foreign tongue. “I’ll take it under advisement.”

Luna smiled serenely and continued to flounce the hem of her dress—that Hermione was ninety-nine percent sure was inside out—each time she brushed it with her swinging fingers.

Harry shifted his weight from his left foot to the right. “Right, well…we should…we should go, I suppose.”

Suddenly it was all very real, her moving out of Grimmauld, moving in here. She’d spent the last months in Scotland, but returning and seeing her friends during holidays was always a given. Seeing Harry and Ron would be less of an inevitability now, more of something they’d have to make certain they didn’t slouch on, plan for regularly in a way that would fit with the demands of everyone’s busy schedules. It wasn’t sad, not like losing someone, but it was another chapter closing.

Unable to restrain herself, she flung her arms around Harry and Ron both, pressing up on her tiptoes so that she could grip them around the necks and tug them closer to her height. Harry chuckled, but they both wrapped her up, returning the hug.

“If you both don’t write to me at least once a week, so help me…” she threatened.

Ron huffed but squeezed tighter. “We’ll set up a weekly thing, okay?”

Harry’s chin bumped the top of her head when he nodded. “We can meet up at the Leaky or
She sniffed hard. She would _not_ cry, because if she cried Harry and Ron would think she didn’t really want to move here. They’d start a spat and Draco and Theo would both be upset thinking _she_ was upset and just—no. She took a step back and nodded briskly. “Sounds like a plan. Now get out of the here, the both of you. I need to unpack and I can’t do it with you hovering.”

Theo cleared his throat. “I’ll walk you out.”

Harry squeezed her shoulder and Ron smiled before turning and stepping out into the hall after Theo.

Luna stepped forward and took her hand, squeezing her fingers lightly before depositing a bundle of—what _was_ that? Was that…bread? Yes, apparently it was. A crust of brown bread and a sprinkle of pink salt rested in her palm.

Luna smiled. “Bread so your house may never know hunger and salt so your life will always have flavor.”

“That’s…lovely, Luna. Thank you.” Was she supposed to—supposed to eat it?

“You’re very welcome, Hermione,” she said, staring, not blinking, not moving, not leaving. The food was symbolic, right? She wasn’t _really_ supposed to eat it, was she? Gods, Luna…

“I’ll owl you next week so we can arrange a time to discuss our plans going forward,” she said, still holding this piece of what looked like rye bread and coarse salt. “We can meet for tea.”

Luna walked backward on her toes. “Enjoy your new home, Hermione. Goodbye, Draco.”

“Bye, Luna.” Draco inclined his head.

As soon as she was out the door, Hermione rounded on Draco, shaking her hand. “What am I supposed to do with this?”

Draco scooped the bread and salt from her palm and set it on top of one of the boxes. “At least Lovegood had the decency to bring a housewarming gift. Theo and I left a bottle of firewhisky in the kitchen at Grimmauld for Weaslette. It’s called having manners, something Potter and Weasley could do with more of.”

“It _was_ kind, if not a bit strange,” she conceded. “Is it awful that I wish you’d have kept the firewhisky, though?”

“Long day?” Setting his hands on her hips, Draco pulled her nearer.

She dropped her forehead to his chest and sighed. “I need to unpack.”

“Leave it for tomorrow.” His hands slid from her hips, stroking her back.

With a groan, she straightened and shook her head. “I shouldn’t procrastinate. Not like it’s that much, but all my books…”

Draco tangled his fingers with her and tugged her across the room to where three floor-to-ceiling bookshelves covered the wall. “Speaking of, I had some of the books from these shelves transferred to the library. I thought you might want at least _some_ of your collection closer by.”
He’d cleared out at least half the books, leaving plenty of room for hers.

Closets and dresser drawers were one thing, but that he’d given her bookshelves? She dropped his hand and threw her arms around his shoulders, breathing him in. Gods, he smelled good. “Thank you.”

Draco wrapped his arms around her and tucked his chin over her head, humming softly. “Why are you thanking me? It’s your home now, too.” He cleared his throat and pulled away enough to look her in the eye. “I want you to be happy, be happy here. I’m rather invested in your happiness at this point.”

“I am happy,” she promised. “Bookshelves or not.”

Draco cocked his head, brow arching and lips twitching. “You’re only saying that because of the library.”

“And the bathtub,” she teased.

“Bathtub?” Theo stepped inside the room and shut the door with his foot, his hands full. In one hand he carried a bottle of wine and in the other three glasses by their stems. “What’s this about our bathtub?”

Ours. She liked that.

“Are you certain we can’t convince you to unpack later?” Draco asked. “We could wait, enjoy a little wine—”

“Relax in the bath,” Theo added.

There would be no relaxing if they got in that bathtub.

“Nice try,” she said, shaking her head. “I want to unpack now, get it over with, and then later we can…unwind.”

Theo shrugged and uncorked the bottle, filling each glass with a generous pour. “You can sip and unpack, can’t you?”

With three sets of hands, unpacking went quicker than she imagined. The boxes and trunks dwindled until…

“Hold on.” Draco was staring down into one of the boxes filled with keepsakes, a look of undisguised glee brightening his eyes and pinking his cheeks. “Are these…plushies?”

Cheeks warm, she slapped her hands down on the flaps of the box, but she was too slow. Theo slipped around her and snatched the lightweight box, carrying it across the room while Draco held her back, arms banded around her waist.

“They’re Beanie Babies,” she argued. “My mum used to buy them for me. They’re very popular Muggle collectibles.”

Theo grinned down at the box and sifted through them, tossing them one by one on the bed. “Collectibles? They’re soft toys, love.”

“Some people think they’re going to be worth a lot of money one day. They’re practically a financial investment.” Not that she necessarily believed in their eventual worth, but some people
did. It sounded better than admitting she was nearly twenty and still owned plushies.

Draco cackled. “Real estate is a financial investment. Gold, silver, rare potions ingredients…”

“Books,” Theo added. He snatched one of the Beanie Babies from the bed and held it up. “Is this a snake?”

“A plushie snake?” Draco pinched his lips together. “Granger.”


Theo’s shoulders shook with poorly restrained laughter. “Gods, Draco, listen to this. Curled and coiled and ready to play, he waits for you patiently every day. He’ll keep his best friend, but not his skin. And stay with you through thick and thin!” Theo lifted his hand to his mouth and bit down on his fist. “He comes with a poem?”

“A little rudimentary, but not awful,” Draco mused.

Theo waggled his brows. “Curled and coiled and ready to play? I really want to make an innuendo but it feels extra dirty to joke like that while holding a plushie.”

Her face was on fire. “I don’t cuddle the damn things. They used to sit on my shelf and then they went in a box and now they’re here and you can—you can throw the whole thing in a closet. See if I care.”

“Granger, calm yourself,” Draco tutted and leaned down, kissing her cheek. Her face was so hot that even his lips felt cool. “We’re having a laugh.”

“At my expense.”

“His name is Hissy according to this precious little heart-shaped tag,” Theo said as if that gave him free rein to tease. “It’s too perfect not to joke.” He froze, jaw dropping as he reached across the bed. “You have a lion, too?”

“Of course she does,” Draco said. “What’s his name?”

Theo sputtered, peeling open the tag. “Roary. Oh sweet Salazar, listen. Deep in the jungle they crowned him king, but being brave is not his thing. A cowardly lion some may say. He hears his roar and runs away!”

Draco’s arms dropped from around her waist as he collapsed to his bum on the floor in one of those rare displays of emotion that never failed to humble her. She was lucky enough to see them, those moments of unrestrained laughter and joy and even the unfortunate moments of sadness, see him drop his guard and let loose, even if he was poking fun at her. “No, it bloody does not say that.”

She bit the inside of her cheek. She had always hated Roary’s poem, just a bit. “Keep digging and you’ll find my favorite of the bunch.”

Theo cut his eyes and then, with a single-minded focus, checked each and every plushie until he…

“No. It isn’t.”

She nodded. “Mhmm. His name’s Runner.”

Draco stood, brushing off his trousers even though the floor was spotless. “Is that…?”

Theo cleared his throat. “A ferret, mongoose, weasel or mink. What am I…what do you think? Find
a book, look and see, I'm whatever you want me to be!” Theo pinched his lips so tight they turned white at the close. He turned the tag over and snorted. “That was the nice version. The mean one goes, I'm not so mean, I'm really shy, but every cobra has to die. I grab them by their little head. And whack them till they’re stone cold dead! Bloody hell, that’s violent.”

Draco wrinkled his nose. “One, that ferret isn’t even white, so don’t even, Theo. And two, these are children’s toys?”

“They are collectibles. Collectibles my mother purchased.”

“Call them whatever you’d like,” Theo said. “But we’re keeping these.”

“They have a certain…charm,” Draco conceded. “Mostly because they’re yours and the thought of you being so frivolous is…”

“Adorable?” Theo offered.

Draco nodded. “Adorable, Granger.”

She snatched her wine off the dresser and finished the last swill in the bottom. “I’m not sure if I should thank you or hex you, but I’m in a good mood so we’ll call it a draw.”

“Where should I put these?” Theo nodded at the dozen or so plushies strewn across the bed.

She studied the room, worrying the edge of her lip. Her books had been neatly organized—alphabetically by author’s surname, naturally—and her photos—some magical and a few Muggle—had been dotted around on the room on various surfaces. It wasn’t that she couldn’t find somewhere to store her collectibles, but the whole room was so clean, so classy, decked out in shades of dark wood and green fabrics, mature, that her childhood plushies didn’t really fit anywhere.

Not that she minded. Even though the room was meant to be as much as hers as Draco’s and Theo’s, she didn’t want to change it, not more than she already had, softening the drapes from the heavy velvet curtains to a gauzy fabric that let a little more light in. “Is there somewhere I can store them? A spare room or attic, perhaps?”

Draco shrugged. “If that’s what you want. You could set them all around the room and I wouldn’t—” He paused. “Okay, I’d mind a bit because that sounds terribly tacky.”

Theo snorted. “Points for trying. You want me to box them back up?”

She nodded.

And that was…Merlin, that was everything. She had officially moved in. “That’s all of it, I suppose.”

Draco cleared his throat. When she turned, he was staring at Theo, brows raised.

Theo set the box of plushies aside and stared right back at Draco, brow furrowed until clarity washed over his face, his eyes widening before his expression smoothed, going carefully blank. “No, there’s this other box over here you forgot about.”

On the other side of the bed? She’d unpacked her books on that side of the room, but…she didn’t own so much that she could simply forget a whole box of possessions. “Are you sure it’s mine?”
Theo had long ago moved into the Manor, but he’d kept a few items in storage at Gringotts in addition to a several odds and ends left behind at Nott Manor that he’d slowly been moving over the last week. She’d offered to help, he was helping her so it was only fair, but he’d put his foot down; he didn’t want her setting foot inside his old home, at least not until it had been looked over by a team of curse breakers and even then, he’d seemed wary at the idea of her ever seeing the place.

So maybe the box was his and he was mistaken? That had to be it.

Only, Theo shook his head. “It’s definitely yours.”

How odd.

Draco ushered her across the room, his hand on her hip. When they reached the foot of the bed, he took a seat and tugged her down beside him.

Theo rubbed his palms against his thighs and lifted a shoebox-sized box that definitely wasn’t hers from beside the bed. He ran his hand over the top, stroking the surface before drumming his fingers against the lid. His broad shoulders rose and fell on a deep breath before he looked up, blue eyes dreadfully serious. Her stomach flipped as his jaw slid forward and back before clenching tight.

“How odd.” He thrust the box out at her.

“That isn’t mine.” She shook her head.

Draco plucked her left hand from where it was resting on her thigh and twined their fingers together. “Just take the box, Granger,” he urged.

Why was she so nervous? Probably because Theo was acting nervous and Draco wasn’t helping, his thigh jiggling gently against hers.

What was in the damn box that was not hers no matter what Theo said? She wouldn’t know until she opened it…

Grabbing the box in one hand, she set it down atop her thighs. Immediately, Theo took a seat beside her, wedging her in between the two of them. Usually, she could draw on them for support, but right now? That wasn’t working, not they were brimming with anxious energy.

Sparing one last curious glance at Theo, she slipped the lid from the box and—“What.”

There was another box inside of that shoebox, this one smaller, very small in fact. So small, jewelry box small.

Her throat was the size of a swizzle stick and swallowing almost hurt. “Theo?” He was staring at the box just as intently as she had been, refusing to meet her eye. She turned her head. Draco was watching her with an encouraging smile on his face, the left side of his mouth ever so slightly higher than the right. “Draco?”

He nodded at the box. “Go on, then. It’s not going to open itself.”

Draco squeezed her fingers and released her hand, making it possible for her to reach within the larger box and fish out the smaller one nestled inside.

Was this—was this what she thought it was? And if it was…well, did she want it to be?
Okay, yes, shock had been the overwhelming first reaction, but now…well, they had talked about it, the eventuality of their relationship becoming—not official, because they already were that, but permanent. Bonding. Magical marriage.

They had talked about it and she wanted it, she did, she just hadn’t been anticipating it now, right now, right after moving in together. But the longer she held the soft, velvet box in her hands, the more ready she felt to take one more step closer to forever.

Deep breath, in, out, all she had to do was open the box. The hinge creaked as she pried it open and —

It wasn’t a ring.

It was a key. A beautiful, antique-looking, silver, miniature skeleton key, but a key nonetheless.

She cleared her throat. “It’s lovely, don’t get me wrong, but I’m confused.”

“It’s a key.” Theo’s voice was tight, gravely, thick with emotion and—why?

She nodded. “I see that, but a key to what? A little too late to ask me to move in with you both.” She laughed, playing it off. It was either that or stew in the confusion, the disappointment that she had no business feeling. “And besides, there are no keys to the Manor, only wards, correct?”

Draco nodded. “Right. It’s not a key to the Manor.”

“No this Manor,” Theo said, sighing. He took the box from her hands, set it back inside the shoe box and set the whole thing on the bedside table before turning and cradling her hand in his. “It’s a—it’s symbolic. It doesn’t actually unlock anything, but I didn’t know how to give you this, so the key was Draco’s idea. He’s better at gestures than I am.”

“This?” Theo?

Theo’s tongue darted out, wetting his bottom lip. His lashes fluttered as he seemed to search for the right words, a skill he usually possessed. “I was thinking about how you—we—need a location for the orphanage and the school and it needs a lot of space, obviously. Classrooms, bedrooms, playrooms, offices, a lot of space.” Theo blew out his breath, brow pinching. “I’m—I have no interest in living there, Nott Manor, not ever again, but it’s just sitting there gathering dust and there’s so much room, so many rooms it’s ludicrous. I was thinking, rather than sell the place and make money I don’t need, why not repurpose it?”

Theo gripped her hand in his left, but lifted his right hand to his face and scratched his jaw. “I’m not…I’m not proud of my family, my father, I mean. Most of the memories I have of that place are of boredom at best, abuse at worst. Part of me wanted to raze the whole thing, light it on fucking fire and watch it go up in smoke, but Draco made sure I didn’t do something rash. A good thing, now, because this”—he squeezed her hand—“this could be good, couldn’t it? We could make it something good, something better. For the children.”

Her eyes stung, throat thick. “This is too much.”

Theo reached out, tracing her chin, her jaw. “Good thing I want to give you everything then.”

Gods, she couldn’t not kiss him, not when he said something like that, was looking at her like that, practically begging to be kissed. It took next to zero effort to close the distance between them, to press her lips to his and breathe him in, bite his bottom lip the way he loved. His chest swelled with his breath, pressing against hers as his arm wrapped around her waist, drawing her closer, hauling
her onto his lap where she straddled one of his thighs.

He broke away, panting. His lips were red and wet and smiling and her chest ached, this time for all the right reasons. “Draco deserves some credit. Not only did he keep me from committing arson, but he also convinced me this wasn’t a shite idea.”

She turned, looking at Draco who was staring at Theo, eyes soft and fond. “I told Theo if you were willing to move past the Gods awful memories you have of this place and make it your home, it would be worth it to turn Nott Manor into something redeemable.” He dropped his gaze and scratched his forearm. “I told him you’d at least be on board to try.”

“I am.” She nodded, eyes flitting between them. “This is amazing. Thank you. Thank you both.”

She leaned to the side and kissed the corner of Draco’s mouth, a gentle brush that deepened when Draco turned his head. His tongue swept at the seam of her lips and, at the same time, Theo’s grip on her waist tightened, drawing her closer, pressing her against his lap where he was already half-hard between her thighs.

“I’ve been dying to touch you all day, but your friends are the worst cock blocks, I hope you know. Each time I so much as touched your waist, I thought Weasley was going to _Avada_ me with his eyes.” Theo’s voice was strained. “Please tell me we can celebrate now?”

Rather than answer, she grabbed Draco by the collar of his shirt and tugged him toward Theo. Picking up on the less-than-subtle suggestion, Theo snagged Draco by the back of the neck and closed the scant distance between their mouths. Their lips brushed but didn’t seal, the tangle of their tongues visible in a display so erotic she couldn’t help but rock down on Theo’s lap. Pressure, friction, she wanted _something_.

Theo smirked against Draco’s lips and rolled his hips upward, meeting her halfway, drawing a gasp from her lips.

“Maybe”—Theo’s breath was labored—“we should all be wearing less clothing. Scratch that, _we should definitely be wearing less clothing_.”

Making the first move, Draco shifted, standing from the bed and moving behind her where he grabbed the bottom of her shirt, lifting it over her head. Her bra came next, his slightly cool fingers deftly unfastening the back closure before sliding the straps down her shoulders. Theo hummed and dropped his head, mouth closing around a nipple.

“Oh my God,” she muttered, hands tangling in his hair.

It was distracting, each tug of his teeth sending a pleasant shock of heat between her legs. So distracting that she didn’t notice Draco had unbuttoned and lowered the zipper on her jeans until his hand was wiggling under the band of her knickers and cupping her mound.

“You’re soaked, Granger,” Draco whispered, breath hot and damp against the shell of her ear, his fingers sliding through her folds. “Have you been like this all day? What would your friends think if they knew you were all hot and bothered thinking about _this_ while we were packing your things?”

She let her head fall back against him and whimpered when he slid two fingers inside her cunt, crooking them against the spot that made her see stars. “N—no. I wasn’t…”

Theo released her nipple with an audible pop and stared at her from beneath his dark lashes. “She likes to watch us, remember? That’s what got her hot.” Theo blew a stream of cool air against her
breast, her nipple tightening almost painfully. “A bit of a voyeur, aren’t you, love?”

She moaned in answer, but he’d wanted to hear her say it, want the words, not just the sounds. “Yes.”

She did like watching them, loved watching them, had in some way or another, even back when they hadn’t yet been hers and she’d caught them snogging in the library.

Dancing his fingers up her arms, her shoulders, the sides of her neck, Theo finally tangled a hand in her hair and tugged hard, her back bowing and neck arching, muscles straining ever so slightly in a delicious stretch. She clenched down around Draco’s fingers, her vision crossing at the pressure that built. “Go on, that’s it. Your skin turns the prettiest shade of pink when you’re about to come, you know that? It’s become my favorite color.”

“I thought my eyes were your favorite color,” Draco teased. His fingers curled harder, his thumb brushing her clit within the snug confines of her jeans, and she tumbled over the edge, whimpering through her climax.

Theo hummed. “So fucking beautiful.”

Draco kissed the side of her neck and slipped his fingers from her cunt. Lips brushing her throat, he withdrew his hand from her knickers, fingers shining with wetness. Her face was already flushed, had to be based on how hot she was, but the proof of her arousal on his fingers? A fresh wave of heat wrapped around her throat, climbing up her jaw.

“You want a taste?” he offered Theo.

“Fuck yes. And for the record, I do love your eyes.” Circling Draco’s wrist with his hand, Theo brought Draco’s fingers to his mouth, tongue laving each digit and space in between. He then closed his lips around Draco’s fingers and sucked, humming softly, lids fluttering shut. Draco hissed through his teeth and rocked his hips, his cock hard against her back.

Theo drew back and licked his lips. “Sweeter than sugar quills, love.” His eyes were so dark his pupils swallowed up most of his irises, making his blue eyes look nearly black in the hazy, late afternoon light streaming through the window. “Clothes off, Draco. I need you both naked yesterday.”

Draco huffed out a laugh, but stepped back, stripping off his navy shirt before reaching for the placket of his trousers. “Maybe Hermione still has that time turner.”

“Excuse me,” she said, still catching her breath. “Did we not hear a very real story about the perils of time travel hours ago?”

There was eager and then there was extra eager, and using a time turner to expedite one’s pleasure was beyond the pale.

Theo cupped her face, lips smiling slightly, eyes shining with mock solemnity. “I love you, so fucking much, swottiness and all, but less lecturing while I’m trying to fuck you, please?”

She dropped her eyes pointedly to her jeans. “I’m still wearing pants. Perhaps you need to try a little harder.”

Theo’s answering growl was nearly drowned out by Draco’s laughter, and hers for that matter. Though, her laughter broke off rather quickly when Theo seized her around the waist and tossed her on to the mattress where she landed against her back, bouncing.
Prowling on his hands and knees, all long limbs and tall, lean body, Theo straddled her hips, pinning her to the bed with his weight. He grabbed her left wrist, then the right, and yanked them both over her head, drawing her torso taut.

“You’re in trouble now,” Draco teased, stepping out of his trousers.

Holding her wrists securely in one hand, Theo reached across the bed and snatched his wand. Suddenly, her wrists were bound by something soft and silky that offered just enough give to mind her circulation, but not enough that she could free herself without a struggle.

Bondage, had in theory, aroused her, but it was his silent spell-casting that really turned her on. Not that she’d admit it, not then, not when he was already looking smug.

Theo tossed his wand against the nightstand and grinned, so obviously pleased with himself. “Comfy?”

She cut her eyes and clenched her fingers into fists. “I’m fine.”

He tutted. “Now, don’t pout.” He lightly pinched her bottom lip, grinning. He released it and crawled off the bed. Stripping off his own shirt, Theo then shucked off his trousers before turning and reaching for the band of Draco’s shorts. He tossed a smirk over his shoulder. “I was under the impression you liked to watch?”

Futile as it was, she twisted her wrists and huffed. Merlin, her fingers were twitching, itching with the desire to touch them.

Draco bit his lower lip, laughing lightly. “I think she likes it better when she can touch.”

“Touch us? Or touch herself?” Theo slipped his hand inside Draco’s boxer briefs and withdrew his cock, sliding a palm up Draco’s length. “Is that what you want, love? I bet you’re aching right about now, hmm? Your clit’s throbbing isn’t it? You’ve drenched your knickers, haven’t you?”

Torture, this was bloody torture and Theo knew it, knew it and loved every second of it.

Draco hissed through his teeth and steadied himself, hand gripping Theo’s bicep as his hips rocked, thrusting into Theo’s fist. “Fuck, Theo.”

Apparently, she wasn’t the only one affected by Theo’s words.

“I’d rather you touch me,” she confessed, back arching in a way that pressed the seam of her jeans against her clit—and Theo was right, she was throbbing—just so, just enough to provide a smidge of friction but not enough. “I’d rather you both touch me.”

Her face flamed at the confession, but it had nothing on the heat emanating from both Theo and Draco’s eyes as they turned, watching from beneath heavy lids as she squirmed against the mattress,

“You have something particular in mind?” Theo’s thumb continued to brush just under the head of Draco’s weeping cock, almost absently. Draco clenched his jaw, nostrils flaring.

She did, she really did. “I want—”

No, she couldn’t say it.

With a shrug, Theo resumed stroking Draco off. “Guess you’re content to watch.”
Draco tangled his fingers in the short strands at the nape of Theo’s neck and drew him in, slotting their mouths together, muffling the moan that slipped from between his lips as Theo twisted his wrist.


Why couldn’t he figure out what she wasn’t saying? He had to know, had to know what she wanted, what she meant.

It was Draco who took mercy on her, stepping away from Theo with a faint grimace. He crawled up on the bed beside her, wiggling until they were face to face, eye to eye, and moved a curl away from her cheek before it could fall into her vision. “You have us both.”

His lips twitched, those grey eyes of his gleaming. Oh, he knew exactly what he was doing, that insufferable man. So much for mercy.

“I want both to fuck me,” she said, finally scrounging up the gumption.

Theo grabbed her jeans at the ankle and tugged hard, yanking them down her legs, leaving her in just her knickers, knickers that had slipped part way down her hips revealing the curls between her thighs. “Don’t we often?” he asked, feigning confusion.

Draco rested his palm on her ribs, thumb brushing the underside of her breast back and forth, the all-too-gentle caress making her want to scream. “Are you not satisfied?”

With a heavily put-upon look of sympathy, Theo tutted and shook his head. “Have we left you wanting?”

She twisted her hands, barely able to move unless she wanted to thrash her legs. Not that that would accomplish much besides making her look desperate, even though that’s exactly she was. “I loathe you. I loathe both of you.”

Pressing one kiss to the inside of her knee and then another slightly higher, Theo worked his mouth up her thigh until he rested between her legs on his stomach. His dimples shone in full force as he shifted her knickers to the side and slipped a finger inside her.

When she bit her lip, trying not to make a sound, he grinned. “You loathe us, do you? Means you probably want me to stop, hmm?”

She pinched her lips together.

“Means you definitely don’t want me to put my mouth on you, huh?” He nosed her clit, breathing her in. “Don’t want me to taste this pretty little cunt?”

Fuck, fuck, fuck. “Theo.”

He hummed, breath hot against her core. “Yes?”

She clenched her eyes shut. Winning was overrated. “Please.”

He didn’t hold back. Swiping his tongue up through her folds, Theo lapped at her, his finger crooking occasionally in little pulsing bends that made her gasp and twitch.

When she pried open her eyes, Draco was watching her, his eyes occasionally glancing down to where Theo had his head buried between her thighs. He smiled and trailed his hand from her side
to the back of Theo’s head, raking his fingers through Theo’s hair, whether just to touch or to encourage, who knew.

Good didn’t begin to cut it. Mouth fastened to her clit, Theo slipped his finger from her cunt and shifted it lower, pressing against her arse, circling her rim before breaching her.

“I’m close,” she whispered to Draco. If he kissed her, it would be perfect. It would be—

Draco tugged on Theo’s hair, and all at once, Theo stopped, lifting his head and licking his lips, his blue eyes dark and dilated as he blinked slowly.

“Draco.” She could scream, she was that frustrated.

He moved his hand and brushed her lower lip with the pad of his thumb. “Say the word and I’m sure Theo will gladly continue, but I was under the impression you wanted something else, Granger.”

The something more was silent but heavily implied.

Theo rested his chin beneath her belly button, he and Draco waiting patiently despite the fact that both had to be going mad. She certainly was, and Draco’s hardness was unmistakable, pressed against her hip. Merlin, the tip of his cock was weeping, trailing wetness against her skin. The fact that he and Theo could make sentences right now was…well, she didn’t have even those words.

Impressive, that was it.

She wet her lips. “Will you both please just fuck me already?” She huffed and met Theo’s stare. “You know what I want. I want what you showed me in that—that fantasy of yours, the one from that day in the library when you let me in your head. That’s what I want. I want you both, together.”

Draco rolled over, staring up at the ceiling. He covered his face with his arm and groaned. “Fuck me.”

Theo chuckled. “I think that’s what the lady wants.” He shifted the finger inside her arse a little deeper and licked his lips, studying her carefully. “You think you can handle it?”

Yes. She was aching, empty. Funny how she didn’t usually think of herself as empty until it hit her just how badly she wanted to be filled. Mostly what she wanted was to be as close as humanly possible to them both until their breaths became hers, until she couldn’t say with any certainty where she ended and they began.

She nodded, fingers clenching and unclenching around nothing. “Can I have my hands free first?”

Theo did something that felt stupidly good, his finger pressing against the wall that separated her arse and cunt, and nodded. “Of course.”

Draco grabbed his wand and vanished the bindings from her wrists, massaging her skin gently even though she was perfectly fine. More aroused than she could ever remember being, but fine. Constriction wasn’t much to worry about when most of the blood in her body was between her legs, anyway.

“Toss me the lube while you’re over there,” Theo requested. He grinned when Draco threw the bottle his way. “Thanks.”
Despite the wonderful, lovely—Merlin—gasp-inducing things Theo was doing with his fingers, her mind raced, visions of what Theo had shown her flitting through her head. For all that she wanted it, for all that she’d promised she was sure and she was, logistically speaking…

“Hey.” Draco’s finger smoothed her brow. She’d been frowning and hadn’t even realized it. “We don’t have to—”

She smashed her mouth against his, kissing him quiet.

Of course they didn’t have to. It wasn’t like—Gods, even thinking the words made her flush—double penetration was some pinnacle of togetherness, something to put on a pedestal as the be all, end all of being with them both, loving them both. Everything else they did was very much as real as this, but she did want it, wanted it so terribly her chest ached.

“I want to,” she said, pressing her forehead against his, their noses bumping. “I’m just—”

“Thinking too much?” Draco smirked, pale lashes fluttering as he glanced down. His teeth sunk into his lower lip for just a brief second. “Just, focus on this, okay?”

He captured her lips in a kiss that would’ve made her knees weak had she not been lying down. As it was, her worries jumped ship, her focus zeroed in on the way Draco nipped her bottom lip, and how he traced his tongue against the roof of her mouth making her shiver. If kissing were an Olympic sport, he’d have been a gold medalist, a British national treasure. Not that she’d share him with anyone but Theo.

He was so bloody good at distracting her that it took a moment to realize Theo had stopped, had removed his fingers, and was sitting back on his heels, watching them while ever so slowly—nearly absently—stroking his cock. Gods, when had he lost his shorts?

“Well, don’t stop,” he teased.

Draco chuckled, just a soft sound through his nose, and skimmed his fingers down her side, her hip, her thigh, stopping to wrap his hand around the outside of her knee. “Do you want to roll over? Face me?”

Moving from her back to her side, she brushed her hair out of her face and wiggled, getting comfortable, an easy prospect in a bed this soft.

Hand still touching her knee, Draco tugged gently, urging her to wrap her leg around his waist. Then he leaned back in, resuming their kiss, sucking at her lower lip and teasing it gently between his teeth.

A hand brushed her hip, Theo sidling up behind her, his bare skin brushing hers. She shivered.

“Arch your back,” he requested. “Just a bit, just—perfect. You’re so fucking perfect.”

His fingers curled around her hip, his thumb pressing gently into the cheek of her bum. Lips brushing her shoulder, Theo nudged his cock into the cleft of her arse, shifting until he butted up right against her hole, lining himself up.

She squirmed, panting against Draco’s mouth. Theo was taking his sweet time, teasing her with the head of his already slicked cock, pressing and then pulling back, but never actually breaching her. “Theo.”

Breath hot against her shoulder blade as he chuckled, Theo pressed, this time—finally—entering
her. It was a stretch, it was always a stretch, but the good kind, the kind that made her feel alive, hyperaware of the sensation, her entire brain narrowing down to the feel of skin on skin, hard flesh parting soft, pure feeling, this moment, here and now and nothing more.

“Good?” Theo asked, voice quiet and rough.

Impossibly good. She swallowed, nose bumping Draco’s gently when she nodded. “Yes.”

Draco’s fingers twitched against her thigh and he craned his neck back, staring down at her through his lashes. “Do you need a minute?”

She shook her head.

Swallowing audibly, Draco shifted, his legs tangling with hers, with Theo’s, their knees knocking lightly. Behind her, Theo snorted softly and she pinched her lips together to keep from laughing. Draco rolled his eyes. “Excuse me, but it’s rather a bit more crowded down here than usual.”

“Need a hand?” Theo asked, voice dry.

Draco arched a brow. “Are you offering?”

Theo laughed. “Always.”

Okay, that was it. She couldn’t help it, a giggle slipping out. “Do I need to move my leg? Or something?”

Her options were rather limited.

Draco shook his head and shifted a little further down the bed. “No, I don’t think so, I just need to find the proper”—his cock nudged her clit, making her gasp—“angle.”

“How?” Theo said. He grabbed her thigh, lifting it slightly, opening her further, making her flush even though, honestly? The modesty ship had long since sailed, every inch of her having been explored, most of her tasted by this point.

“Thanks,” Draco muttered, tongue darting out to wet his lips.

Taking himself in hand, Draco ran his cock through her folds, slicking himself before pressing, hips tilting as the head of his cock—

Merlin, she’d never felt so stretched in her life and Draco was barely part way inside her.

She swallowed, muscles trembling, thighs quaking, trying to keep still. “Keep going. Please keep going.”

He had to keep moving. She was all but vibrating with both anticipation and need, her body tense, and the pressure in her chest squeezing so tight that, maybe it was stupid—it was highly illogical—but it felt like she’d expire if they quit now, if either of them stopped touching her.

Draco took a deep breath, almost as if bracing himself. He covered her mouth with his and tucked his hips, thrusting the rest of way inside all in one go. He swallowed the sound she made, a shocked, breathy noise because, Gods.

There wasn’t a proper word for how full she felt. Surrounded, she was entirely surrounded, drowning in them, inside and out, and she could barely move, not when she was teetering on the edge of absolute sensory overwhelm.
“Fuck,” Draco swore against her mouth under his breath.

“You need a minute?” Theo asked, voice gritty and tight like those four words were all he could manage.

Her lids fluttered. Was he speaking to her or—

“No, I’m—this is just…” Draco answered, voice low, just as tense as Theo’s.

“Yeah,” Theo seemed to agree.

Neither of them had really said anything, and yet she knew exactly what they meant.

She was hyperaware of every last breath and blessed shift of skin against skin and silky sheets, every drop of sweat sliding down her back and between her breasts.

“Will someone please do something?” she begged, biting back a whimper. She wasn’t exactly in the position to move save for resting an arm around Draco’s torso, her nails biting into the skin of his back, but she needed someone to move, someone to put her out of this delicious misery where everything was too much and not enough all at once. “Please.”

“Shhh, we’ve got you.” Theo slid his hand up her leg to where her skin met Draco’s, his finger’s brushing Draco’s flank in a gentle caress that watching alone made her shiver. “You want me to… and then you can…?”

Draco’s eyes were heavy-lidded, mostly pupil. “Sure.”

Setting the pace, Theo pulled back until only the head of his cock was inside her, and when he shifted deeper, Draco withdrew before thrusting, slowly. Maddening, it was, her toes curling, pinching nearly painfully from the pleasure, being stretched, filled, over and over again, never actually empty.

“Fucking perfect and so—fuck, tight,” Theo panted. “You’re doing so well, love.”

The sense of overwhelm only intensified when Theo slipped his hand between her thighs between Draco’s body and hers and flicked her clit.

There was no warning, no climb. She’d been hovering somewhere so close to the edge this entire time that it struck her fast and hard and unforgiving, a lightning bolt of pleasure zipping from where they were joined all the way to the ends of her hair.

A low moan spilled from Draco’s mouth as he went still, burying his face in her hair. Theo, too, had stopped moving, save for the rapid rise and fall of his chest.

If she couldn’t move before, she certainly couldn’t now. It felt like she’d been turned inside out, more like she’d been stripped of her outermost layer and now lay bare and exposed. With anyone else, she’d have been terrified, but snug between Draco and Theo, she felt safe. Happy. Loved. And quite thoroughly shagged, too.

“Not to be entirely ineloquent,” Theo muttered. “But fuck.”

That just about summed it up.

“Does anyone else feel like they’re vibrating a bit?” Draco asked, chuckling in a way that sounded a touch nervous.
She hummed. “I feel like my hair is trembling.”

Theo and Draco both laughed.

“Kind of does have a life of its own,” Theo joked. “You never know.”

She reached back, smacking his leg, though the effect was a bit muted with how her hand kind of just…flopped. “Shush, you.”

“So,” Theo ignored her. “O for outstanding?”

“O for out of this world,” Draco muttered.

“Orgasm,” she whispered, more to herself than them, but apparently they heard it because Theo snorted.

“Obviously.” He paused. “You okay?”

She nodded. “Did you mean for that all to start with an o as well?”

“I’m happy to take credit for that clever coincidence, but no,” he said.

“I’m perfect,” she said. “I mean, I can’t feel my toes, but…”

They chuckled, shifting slightly, each pulling faces of discontent as their softening cocks slipped free. She couldn’t bring herself to move more than necessary, a shared problem, apparently, as they all three moved as little as possible, shuffling only until her head rested on Draco’s chest, Theo’s arm slung around her waist.

A comfortable silence blanketed the room. Drifting right on the edge of unconsciousness, torn between waking and sleep, her lips twitched into a frown when Draco squirmed.

“What is it?” Theo asked.

Draco frowned. “I’m not sure. There’s something poking my leg.”

Strange. “Maybe Theo missed one of my…collectibles.”

“Oh come on.” Theo dug his fingers into her ribs, tickling her. “Call them what they are. Soft toys, love.”

Stop.” She laughed, wrapping her arms Draco as if that would help. “Make him stop it.”

Draco shook his head. “I’m rather enjoying this.” His eyes flitted down briefly to where her breasts were smashed against his chest.

Theo finally cut it out. “If it’s not one of Hermione’s”—he snorted—“collectibles, what is it then?”

Draco reached beneath the covers they’d never bothered to pull back, rifling around. She shifted, sitting up, curious. “I don’t know. It feels like…ah, there we go.”

From under the sheet, Draco withdrew a—

A box.

Another box.
Another small, velvet covered box.

Her heart did something that couldn’t be healthy, practically stopping in its tracks before tripping all over itself in some desperate attempt to beat its way out of her chest.

Draco balanced the box on her bare thigh. Something had been poking his leg, her arse. He had to have known this was there, planned this, the both of them.

She swallowed. Apparently, if her heart couldn’t exit through her chest, it was going to try and claw its way up her throat. “I don’t suppose either of you has another manor somewhere, do you?”

Theo kissed the ball of her shoulder. “There’s a summer home or two, but no, no more manors.”

Something in her gut had told her this one wasn’t a key.

“Should I”—she glanced at Theo, then Draco. Both were watching her, Theo nibbling on the edge of his lip, Draco clenching and unclenching his jaw rhythmically, a muscle there jumping—“open it?”

“Please,” Draco croaked.

Theo nodded.

Fingers trembling, Hermione grasped the box in her left hand and pried the lid open with the other quickly, like ripping off a band-aid, but far, far more pleasant.

Nestled inside the box was, not just quite possibly, but without a fraction of a doubt, the most stunning ring she had ever set her eyes upon, a single marquise-cut diamond set in a silver—or white gold, maybe platinum, Gods, she didn’t know—band. She’d call it simple were it not for the fact that calling anything with a diamond that size simple seemed outrageous, egregious, even.

Elegant, that was it. It was elegant. Elegant and gorgeous and—

“Hermione?”

She shook her head. “Sorry, what?”

Theo coughed. “You’re, erm, awfully quiet.”

“Too quiet,” Draco muttered, staring down at the sheets.

Oh. “No! I’m just…”

“No?” Theo blinked, lips twitching downward.

Draco sighed. “Fuck.”

“No, not no. No as in, no, I’m not too quiet. I mean…” She huffed. “Ask.”

Draco lifted his head and swiped his fingers through his hair. “Ask?”

Her cheeks prickled. “No one’s asked me anything.”

“Oh.” Theo’s eyes widened. “Oh.”

She nodded.
Leaning around her, Theo and Draco appeared to communicate silently, brows arching, lips twisting, eyes narrowing. Finally, Draco nodded and cleared his throat. “Granger.” Theo snorted and Draco rolled his eyes, lips curving. “Hermione. You, you and Theo both, are my entire world and I count my lucky stars—”

“Constellations,” Theo whispered, chuckling.

“Wait your turn,” Draco chided. “I count my lucky stars for you every day.”

“Night.” Theo laughed. “Good luck counting stars in daylight.”

“You know what, go fuck yourself, Theo,” Draco said, but he was grinning. He sighed, shaking his head. “Maybe it’s not always easy—okay, it’s often not easy.” He shot Theo a mock-glare. “But it is as simple as the fact that I want, more than anything, to spend the rest of my life with you both.”

She was not going to be one of those girls and cry. She wasn’t. She refused. She wasn’t going to—oh, bugger.

She sniffed hard, pinching her lips together so they wouldn’t tremble.

Panic flickered over Draco’s face, his eyes widening. “Oh Gods, please don’t cry. I hate it when you cry.”

“I’m trying not to,” her voice cracked, a stupid traitorous tear slipping down her cheek.

Draco swallowed hard and blinked fast.

“Hermione,” Theo whispered and she shifted her gaze over to him. His blue eyes were soft, but there was an edge of determination within their depths that made him look so sure, certain. “Marry us.”

“That didn’t sound like a question.” She laughed through her tears, her vision blurring.

Theo chuckled. “It wasn’t one.”

It really wasn’t, was it?

Maybe it was soon, maybe it wasn’t. It didn’t really matter because she loved them and something in her gut, her soul, said she always would.

“Yes.”

“Yes?” Draco echoed.

She nodded.

“Thank fuck,” Theo muttered, snatching the box from the covers and grabbing out the ring. He stared at it for a moment, expression soft and vulnerable. “We debated getting you something new, didn’t much think you’d like a Nott, Malfoy, or Black family heirloom.” His lips twisted. “But this was my mother’s, my grandmother’s actually. Her mum, I mean, not my father’s mother. One of the only belongings of hers I have. I think she would’ve wanted you to have it. But if you don’t like it—”

“I love it,” she said, offering her hand.

Theo nodded, and trembling slightly, took her hand and slipped the ring on her finger. It fit itself to
her finger magically, resizing for the perfect fit.

“Does anyone else need a drink?” Draco asked.

Smiling, she leaned over, kissing him soundly, pouring as much assurance into the kiss as she could muster with just her lips. It seemed to work, Draco’s shoulder’s relaxing, the furrow between his brows softening.

“You worry too much,” Theo teased.

“Like you weren’t about to have a fit over there,” Draco fired back. “You went white as a ghost.”

Just in case Theo was still worrying, she kissed him, too.

“I wasn’t kidding about that drink,” Draco said, moving to stand. “We can make it champagne if you’d like.”

She grabbed his arm. “Wait. Aren’t you both forgetting something?”

Draco frowned and Theo shook his head.

“Don’t you need to ask each other something?” she prompted.

Theo snorted. “Oh. Draco, would you like to get married? If you say no, I’ll never speak to you again.”

“A tempting prospect,” Draco joked.

She nudged him. “Draco.”

“Yes, I’ll marry you, Theodore,” he answered, grey eyes bright. He turned back to her. “Happy?”

Absolutely.

Chapter End Notes

A/N: I did not write the Beanie Baby poems, FYI. Those are from the tags, so I totally don’t claim ownership. And in case anyone is a Beanie Baby aficionado, I know that Runner (the ferret BB) wasn’t released until 2000, but let's pretend :)”

Thank you all for reading and I so hope you enjoyed the end. To everyone who read, left kudos, commented (especially those who commented on every chapter!!!), subscribed, I love you. Writing this has been the highlight of the last few months. In addition to the currently untitled sequel, I have a few one-shots and another multi-chaptered fic I’m working on. Stay tuned!

<3 InLoveWithForever

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!