Summary

This will be the best of my Dracolicious drabble series.
Lucius Maltby, former death eater, had been turned into marshmallow extraordinaire by the tow-headed three year old boy in front of him.

"Gampuh! Mummy and Daddy are meanies!"

"Hush, Scorpius. Don't call your parents names," gently scolded Narcissa.

Lucius grinned. You're right, my boy, he thought. Mummy and Daddy are meanies. Draco had gone and married the most famous muggle-born of his generation without caring a fig about what that would do to his father's self-esteem.

Death eater? Bah. Patriarch of the Maltby Dynasty? Tosh. The house of Maltby was now ruled by a half-blooded grandson, the spitting image of his father, with the addition of curly hair and never-ending inquisitiveness, courtesy of his mother.

Wizards who had once trembled when in the presence of Lucius now smirked as they watched him melt into an indulging puddle of goo whenever out with Scorpius.

But the elder Maltby knew how to turn the tables on Scorpius' parents. Lucius had enjoyed the satisfaction of knowing he could exact his revenge by shamelessly spoiling his grandchild whenever the moment allowed, then send him home to let his parents deal with the consequences of it.

Revenge, indeed.

"What's this, Scorpius? Why would you call Daddy and Mummy meanies?" he asked.

"It's tuwoo, Gampuh," the little boy insisted. Turning his big, gray eyes upon his grandfather, he said, "Mummy's gots toys. But shes won't share. And Daddy says shhhh! whens I ask."

Lucius raised an eyebrow while inspecting Hermione's scarlet face. "What kind of toys, Love?"

"Father!" Draco hissed.

"Mummy's gots balls," the little tot explained. Pointing to his mother's well-endowed chest, now enhanced by her second pregnancy, he said, "Mummy's balls. See? I wants to pway wif dem. But Mummy won't share!"

Hermione's face turned an even deeper shade of red. "Scorpius!"

"I believe those are Daddy's toys," Lucius drawled mischievously.

Draco looked about ready to Avada his father.

"Is that tuwoo, Daddy? Do yous plays wif Mummy's balls?"

"Oh, good Lord," Narcissa moaned.
Lucius was too devilish to let the moment pass. "Why don't you ask Daddy if he lets Mummy play with his *bat*?"

Scorpius looked from his grandfather's laughing face to his father's crimson one. "Yous gots a bat, Daddy? Let me see!"

"Do you know what you've done?" Narcissa fussed at her husband. "That child won't stop now!"

Giving Lucius a look that would have made even Voldemort cower in fear, Hermione said, "Scorpius, there will be no more discussion of my brea…uh, balls and er…..Daddy's bat. Do you understand?"

The little boy's face crumpled in disappointment. He tottered over to his grandfather, who picked him up and lovingly held him in his arms.

"There, there, my boy," he cooed as he patted his back. "Gampuh will make it up to you. I'll buy you a toy that *you* won't have to share."

"Okay," Scorpius mumbled into his grandfather's neck. Squeezing it as tightly as a little boy could, he said, "Yous not a meanie."

Lucius smiled benignly at his exasperated son and daughter-in-law.

_Ha!_ Lucius thought to himself. _Payback was so sweet!_
Chapter 2

He Didn't Know

Draco Malfoy didn't know.

He didn't know as he walked up the stairs going to the Room of Requirement, that inside the Gryffindor girl's dorms, an event just occurred that would change the direction of his life. He didn't know Ginny Weasley was a seer; Ginny didn't know it herself. He didn't know she had just uttered a prophecy, to the surprise of the only witness in the room, Hermione Granger. He didn't know that just like him, Hermione thought Divination was a rubbish subject. Apparently, Destiny didn't care a jot whether the subjects of prophecy believed in fate; it didn't matter that the two involved in this one were confirmed doubters. Providence had its way of dealing with humans like this.

The first time, it had been spontaneous.

Draco hadn't meant to protect Hermione from the deatheaters swarming the school's hallways. But something about seeing her determined, yet heartbroken expression triggered a protective response from him. He still thought of Hermione as a filthy mudblood, but even she deserved better than to be cut down in the very corridors where she'd reigned supreme. It just didn't sit well with him, somehow. So when he saw Bellatrix take aim at Hermione, Draco jostled his aunt's arm just enough so she avada'd a painting instead.

Livid in her disappointment, she yelled, "You made me miss the mudblood!"

"There'll be another time," Draco said, not knowing how true his words would be. "Come on…..we need to go."

The second time had been necessary.

His deranged aunt was going to kill Hermione, and Draco knew Harry Potter would not survive without her. By this time, Draco knew the truth; he knew what the future would hold if the Dark Lord was victorious. Harry had to win to save the Wizarding World. To do it, the boy-who-lived needed the witch who was currently writhing in a pool of her own blood. So when Draco summoned his former house elf to beg for his help, he was profoundly relieved when Dobby made a way for the trio to escape.

And the third time?

Draco wasn't really sure why he'd felt compelled to save Hermione from the fiendfyre Crabbe had started. Only that she'd somehow become a beacon, a light; a symbol of all that was good and pure. Yes, pure.

She was also a hope. A hope that he'd be able one day to be a part of that pure, shining world, where selfless, good people like Hermione lived.

When she'd showed up at his trial to give testimony on his behalf, Draco found within himself a glimmer of that hope he had longed for. Maybe, his life could improve. Maybe he could change.
Two weeks after his acquittal, Draco received a message delivered by a strange-looking owl. On the parchment was an invitation for lunch. Curiously, the directions given would take him to a muggle park. There was no name at the bottom of the scroll; only the letter H. The only two people he could think of with names starting with the letter H who would ask to meet with him in a muggle area were Harry Potter and Hermione Granger. He desperately hoped it was the latter.

Draco's wish was granted. She was standing under a tree in the park, looking like an angel from heaven. Sunlight filtered through the branches, giving her a golden crown upon her curly, lustrous hair. In her hand was a little glass ball.

"Thank you for coming," she said softly.

"Of course," he murmured, still staring at the small orb she clutched. Was that what he thought it was?

Hermione smiled when she saw his attention staying on her hand. "Prophecies can only be taken from the Department of Mysteries by those whose prophecy it is." She held out the ball for him to take. "Listen to it."

Draco took the glass with shaking fingers. As soon as his hand touched the orb, clouds began to swirl inside it. Then he saw an image of a younger Ginny Weasley in her Hogwarts uniform. She began to speak in a voice unlike her own.

The Great House will fall
But not to ruin
Love will be his final Master
The Punishment will be the Shield
And under the Pureblood's name
The Well-born will abide in safety forever.

After the orb became silent again, he looked up to see Hermione's eyes glittering with some deep emotion.

"Well-born?" was the only thing Draco could think of to say.

She smiled. "My name, Hermione.....it means well-born."

The ramifications of the prophecy and what Hermione just said began to overwhelm him.

"Since our sixth year, I've known what you would be for me," she whispered. "What you would do....for me." Hermione then timidly closed the gap between them and putting her head on his chest, wrapped her arms around his waist. "Thank you for saving me," she mumbled into his shirt.

Draco immediately wrapped his strong arms around her sweet frame and held Hermione as tightly as he could. The feeling was incredible. Laying his head on top of hers, he could smell the fragrance of her shampoo. Coconut. Or was it almond? Whichever it was, the scent of it was intoxicating to his senses.

"Hermione?" he breathed. When she looked up at the sound of her name, Draco gently tilted her
chin and tenderly captured her lips with his own. The kiss was perfection, just like he'd always known it would be.

Had always known…

Was that true? Had his soul always known what his mind and heart had had to learn?

Draco Malfoy didn't know.

AN: Trink didn't know, either. I looked up Hermione's name to find out the meaning of it and saw two different meanings from multiple sources. One was messenger, the other was well-born. Since I'm not Greek, I couldn't confirm either and went with the one I liked best.
Barbecue

Draco didn't know what to make of this as he looked around the swampy landscape. Moss hung down from knobby cypress trees, while hidden frogs and crickets conducted a competition to see which of them could make the most racket. Draco wiped his forehead with the napkin he held in his hand; had he ever sweated as much before? When Hermione asked him to accompany her to a family reunion, he assumed she meant her family in England. He didn't know the Grangers had relatives living in the United States...the Deep South, to be exact. The Grangers (pronounced Gron-jay) of South Louisiana were a loving, crazy bunch of Cajuns. Draco never before imagined muggles using a witch's cauldron to prepare their food, although Hermione informed him they called it a fryer instead. Whatever it was, when Hermione's uncle lowered a raw turkey into it, the thing bubbled and smoked like Neville Longbottom's cauldron had in their long-ago potions class.

Even now, the pot was hissing at anyone who walked by. Not too far away from it, another relative, a cousin if he remembered correctly, was checking on some dead animal that had been put in a dark, smoking coffin...thing. The poor beast had been smoldering all night. In the back of his mind, Draco was tempted to think that perhaps muggles who lived in the midst of creepy bayous might still be primitive and below wizarding standards. He was considering it until Hermione popped a bit of the smoked meat into his mouth.

Merlin! What a taste! Draco's eyes rolled upward in bliss. He'd never before imagined eating meat that had such a complex flavoring of moist, tangy, sweet, smoky, and salty. It was divine.

"Oh Sweet Circe...tell me I can have some more of that," he groaned as he finally swallowed the morsel.

Hermione giggled. "I thought you would like that."

"What was it?"

"Barbecue."

Draco cocked his head, trying to understand the unfamiliar term.

"Bobby....coo?"

Grinning, Hermione nodded. "Close enough."

"And.....they eat like this often?"

"Um....yeah. Fairly often."

Draco began to get excited. His mind was considering the possibilities. "Do you think your uncle would help us get one of those....ah.....coffin cookers?"

Hermione laughed again. "Well, he will if he knows what you're talking about. Tell him you want to purchase a charcoal grill smoker."

"Charcoal grill smoker...charcoal grill smoker....." Draco practiced under his breath. "Got it."

Before he left to go find said uncle, he turned around to whisper, "You did say he knew about......us. Right?"
"You mean our being magical?"

Draco nodded.

Hermione smiled. "Yes….he's the only one here who does."

Draco smiled back, relieved. "So….he would be alright with me sending Mipsy and Dodgy over here? He could show them how to use the smoker, right?"

Hermione bit her lip. "Uh…well….."

Draco looked at Hermione with big puppy-dog eyes. He knew her weaknesses. "Please….love?"

Hermione huffed. "Honestly! You're just as bad as Ronald Weasley. Always thinking with your stomach."

"Granger, you wound me," Draco said as he lay his hand over his heart. "Can't a husband make a simple request of his beloved wife?"

Giving in, Hermione shook her head in fond amusement. "Oh…..alright. But let me talk to my uncle first. He's already a candidate for a heart attack eating like this. I don't want to have him keeling over when he sees our elves for the first time."

"Anyone who tussles with alligators for a living shouldn't be afraid of a little elf," Draco observed.

True to his word, Draco purchased a grill and sent over their elves to learn how to use it. Hermione's Uncle Boudreaux and his wife, Marie had been delighted to meet the magical creatures.

"Gardes don! And here I tought they would give me the frissons," Marie cooed. "Dey's cher!"

"Let's name em," Boudreaux suggested. So Mipsy and Dodgy became Clotile and Thibodeaux while they learned the secrets of Cajun grilling. So enamored were they with the two, Boudreaux and Marie even gave them the recipe for their family's secret spice rub.

Marie was misty-eyed when the elves went back to England.

"Do you tink we'll ever see dem again?" she asked her husband.

"I don't know," he said. "Mais I know dis…..dem creatures are sure cute."

It was all Hermione could do not to laugh at the scene before her. Her refined in-laws, the infinitely wealthy and aristocratic Malfoys were chowing down on their first taste of grilled meat like they'd been starving all their lives. Lucius had barbecue sauce smeared on both his cheeks, thanks to his gnawing on a particularly meaty rib. He was going after it like a dog with a bone. Hermione heard Draco cough down a queer little choke when he looked up and saw his mother acting similarly with a chicken leg.

"What have we unleashed?" he whispered to his wife.
Unknown to the both of them, Mipsy and Dodgy were watching the scene from behind the curtains.

"Missus' aunt and uncle were right," Dodgy said.

Mipsy agreed. "Yes…..theys said the spices would make them *Mange* ."

"Like a gator, theys said," added Dodgy.

Tru 'dat.

---

**Cajun French definitions**

Gardes Don: Look at that

Cher: Sweet, dear

Frissons: Chills, shiver

Mais: But

Mange: Eat

Boudreaux and Marie / Clotile and Thibodeaux are the familiar names in a multitude of Cajun Boudreaux jokes.
Chapter 4

It Should Have Been Me

Draco was walking down the ministry’s hallway one spring day when he heard a commotion. Suddenly, a door opened up and a herd of freckly redheads tumbled out of an office and into the corridor where Draco was standing.

"He said they were two minutes apart now," he overheard Ginny say to her brothers.

Draco watched as Harry Potter winced. "Is she…..is she cooperating? Did she take the potion?"

Ginny grinned. "Oh, yeah. Ron said after the first hour, she caved." Looking into her husband's eyes, she assured him. "Hermione's okay, Harry. She's going to be fine."

So. Granger was in labor. Draco knew she was due. The last time he'd seen her, she'd looked like she'd swallowed a melon whole. Draco flinched at the memory. He despised the thought of Hermione carrying Ron's child. He remembered when the two of them married. Draco had been under house arrest for a year after the war. Six months into his sentence, he'd been summoned to the ministry to meet with his probation officer and had run into the couple. They'd been outside the double doors of the Auror department, apparently having a row.

"Ron…..why the rush?" she asked.

"What's the matter, Sweetheart?" the redhead sneered back. "Waiting for a better offer?"

It was after that when Hermione turned her head and noticed they had an audience to their spat. Draco studied her face. To him, it didn't look like the face of a woman in love, but rather of a woman being pushed. A woman being pressed. A woman…..who was slowly losing her own identity.

Draco knew that feeling. The suffocation that came with the burden of another's willful expectation. His own father had dominated his choices. And now it looked like Weaselbee and his family were attempting the same thing with Granger.

Don't do it! he mentally whispered.

When Hermione had been tortured in his home, Draco had experienced an epiphany. This girl, the one who had been such a thorn in his flesh, was in every way his counterpart. He'd not realized it until he'd been forced to watch her writhe and shriek under his aunt's assault. The commitment and loyalty she showed for the people she loved was the same as his own. Both would do whatever it took to protect their loved ones. That day had been the beginning of Draco's revelation. It had grown when he saw her resistance to Ron's plan for an early marriage…..and it had died when she'd finally and wearily acquiesced to his demands.

Draco read of their wedding in the papers. He'd gazed at the pictures, full of smiling Weasleys but none of a happy bride. He knew her too well to be fooled by the calm demeanor the photographer had captured.

Coming back to the present, he watched as the Weasley parade left the ministry. Draco slowly followed them up the street to St. Mungo's. He stopped first at the little gift shop located on the first floor and purchased a dozen roses and a stuffed teddy bear to have them be delivered later to Hermione. Then he found which floor was the maternity ward and made his way up to the nursery.
Looking through the heavy glass window, he glanced around to find the newest addition to the House of Weasley. There she was, a precious little bundle who thankfully, did not have the trademark red hair that usually accompanied her last name. Draco looked at the card at the foot of her crib. Cassiopeia Rose Weasley. Cassiopeia? They gave their daughter a constellation name? Draco would have bet his last knut that it had been Hermione's idea to give her daughter that distinction. Just like they would have if she had been theirs. Draco bit his lip in pain. That was what had brought him to this point. He knew deep down in his heart what should have been. He and Hermione belonged together. Like tea and crumpets….fish and chips…pumpkin pasties and butterbeer. She would never match Ron, she would never fit him like she would have Draco. His heart beat painfully to the tune of that truth. This baby before him should have blonde wispy tendrils and grey eyes. Draco squeezed his own eyes shut as tears threatened to fall. Everything about this was wrong! He knew that on every level. Hermione should have been his wife, not Weasley's. That baby should have been his! That undeserving git stole his future...

...It should have been me! Not him...me. That baby should be a Malfoy...a Malfoy...

"...Mr. Malfoy.....Mr. Malfoy. You need to wake up! I have your daughter for you," a cheery voice hovering over his head announced.

Draco looked around. Was he still at the hospital? It looked like it. A medi-witch stood beside his chair, holding a wee babe wrapped in a pink blanket. He was confused. Had the nurse said... his daughter?

"What is it, Darling? You look like you've seen a ghost."

Draco's eyes widened at the familiar sound. He knew that voice. Turning his head, he saw Hermione resting on a nearby bed with a beatific smile on her tired face. No calm acceptance this time, a real and honest smile graced her countenance. Draco looked from her to the nurse. Had all that before been just a dream? It had felt so real. Draco sat there gawking.

"Mr. Malfoy?"

He didn't say a word when the nurse finally took matters into her own hands and deposited the newborn in his arms. Peeking over the swath of blankets, Draco saw the angel face of a baby girl…a baby girl with blonde curls and grey eyes...his baby girl. Tears once again threatened to form, but this time Draco made no attempt to stop them.

Hermione watched Draco silently weep as he held their child. "Come here," she whispered as she patted a place beside her on the bed while moving over to give her husband room. "Isn't she beautiful?" she murmured, looking down at their daughter sleeping in her father's strong arms. Sighing contentedly, Hermione laid her head against Draco's shoulder.

"She's.....ours," Draco choked out while shining tears made paths down his cheeks. Each drop a silent prayer of gratitude that the nightmare he'd experienced had been only that. Unable to contain his joy, he leaned down to capture his wife's lips in a heartfelt kiss. "Thank you, Love.....for giving her to me."

Hermione's eyes twinkled as she giggled. "I seem to recall you helping a bit with her creation. So, thank you. You've made me the happiest woman in the world."

Draco sighed in blissful satisfaction. For a few moments, heavenly peace reigned. Then both heard voices coming from outside their room. Their door creaked open and Ginny and Harry Potter sauntered in, bearing gifts of a massive teddy bear, flowers and a bottle of wine.
"Mione!" Ginny squealed. "May I hold her?"

Draco chuckled when after a small nod from his wife, Ginny tenderly gathered the babe into her arms. "Ooo…..she's a beauty. What are you going to call her?"

"Cassiopeia. Cassiopeia Rose," Hermione answered. Draco couldn't stop the wide grin covering his face.

*My baby!* he crowed in secret delight.

"Open your eyes for your godmother, Cassiopeia," Ginny cooed at the sleeping babe. If she thought the name odd, she didn't mention it.

"Here, 'Mione," Harry said, giving his best friend the bouquet of flowers as he kissed her on the cheek.

"Harry….you didn't have to do that," Hermione said.

"Oh yes, I did. It's not every day my sister has a baby," he replied. "And here…..we were told to bring you Mr. Bear."

"To ld? It's not from you?"

Harry scratched the back of his neck. "Um….no." Looking apologetically at Draco, he said, "Actually….it's from Ron."

Hermione's brows rose up at that answer. Eyeing her husband, she shrugged her shoulders as they both read the card that was attached to the ribbon around the stuffed animal's neck.

It read, "Congratulations Hermione. Love, Ron."

Later that evening, after the Potters had left, Draco magically enlarged the bed and climbed up in it to hold his wife.

"It was nice for Ron to send the bear," Hermione said as she softly ran her fingers through Draco's hair. "But I must say….I was surprised. " Looking at her husband, she bit her lip. "I had expected Ron to be upset. You know, we didn't end well."

"It feels weird that he was the one who gave Cassie her first toy," Draco admitted.

"Oh? Why?" asked Hermione.

Draco smiled in secret relief that Fate had seen fit to turn the tables in real life. "Oh, well...I guess it should have been me."

---

**AN:** I had a former boyfriend who sent me flowers after the birth of my first child, a girl. I was afraid my husband would be upset, but all he did was shrug his shoulders and say, "Well...your old beau saved me the bother, didn't he? Just one less thing I have to do!"

My husband...Mr. Romance. LOL
Chapter 5

Content Warning: Mutilation of a corpse. If that's a trigger for you, skip the second paragraph.

Sympathy

The first time, it was for him. You saw him, just like you thought you would, among a group of somber-clad wizards giving him cold comfort. Your heart inexplicably ached for Draco as you watched him in that moment; the stony group surrounding him were ill-equipped to give support; snide asides seemed more their specialty. You noticed the smug smirks that covered their faces when the upturned earth was lifted to cover both his parents' graves.

You'd seen the headlines; you had also heard the rumors the paper didn't print. How Lucius Malfoy, maddened by his pride, killed his own wife when he'd discovered she was the reason the Dark Lord had been defeated. Her lie, the one that had allowed Harry Potter to live, had driven her husband to the point of no return. Once Yaxley had told Lucius of her betrayal to the cause, he'd grabbed Draco's mother from the scene of battle and apparated back to Wiltshire with her in tow. There, underneath the chestnut tree where Draco had played as a lad, Lucius had ended his wife's life with an Avada to her temple. Thankfully, he had done that first, as his wrath was apparently not satisfied with so simple a death. He drew a blade from his boot to finish off his anger. The first thing to go would be her lips; Lucius was determined they should feel the pain of lying to their Master. Her tongue soon followed. Then next to go was the hand that had felt for life in the body of Harry Potter. On and on he went, cutting off any member that had been a part of her deception. Once his rage was spent, Lucius sat down among the ruined remains of what had once been his wife. It was then when his rational mind made a comeback. Crying in horror, he saw what he had done; despair became his new master. With no thought to what he was leaving for his son to find, he took his wand and Avada'd himself as the last act of a cruelly selfish man.

Shuddering at that memory, your thoughts shift back to Draco as you watch him. You sadly realize the rumors were true. His normally proud shoulders are bent with the weight of his silent grief. Seeing his pain makes the strength of your anger rise for his sake. Little wonder he was always so petulant and hateful in school; you now ponder how he managed to maintain any semblance of normalcy with a father like that. Still, you know how the love for one's parents runs deep. As much as he must hate what his father did, you instinctively feel he mourns for his passing, too, while feeling revulsion at himself for feeling it. It is a double-edged sword that is impaling the heart of the heir of the Ancient House of Malfoy. You wait underneath a neighboring tree until the group of purebloods leave. After the last one, Theo Nott, moves away, you hesitantly walk up to your former nemesis. He has yet to acknowledge your presence. You think he hasn't heard you, so you start in surprise when he turns to look at you with pain-filled eyes.

His normal sneer is absent; he looks a shell of his former self. Summoning all your Gryffindor courage, you take one of his hands in both of yours and say, "Draco….I'm truly sorry for your loss."

He would look at you in astonishment if he could summon up the energy to do so. Instead, his bottom lip trembles, and he squeezes your hands as if they were a lifeline. "Hermione," is all he
can utter before you act. You instinctively release his hand to hug him instead. He's stiff in your arms at first; then he crumbles as he sobs on your shoulder. You rub his back while he cries and wonder if this was the first display of affection he's been given. That thought makes you hug him harder, longer. When he finally releases you, you give him a parting gift of goodwill; you transfigure a clump of earth near the grave site into a wreath of roses to rest above the ground where his mother is buried. Once again, his lip trembles with emotion. Before you leave, you rise on your tip-toes to place a kiss on his cheek. He looks at you in awe; you think it's possibly the first time he's ever really seen you. It is a look you'll never forget. But you doubt you'll ever see it again.

Your doubts turn out to be false. You do see that look again and under similar circumstances. When your parents return home from Australia in body bags instead of stepping from an airplane, you learn hatred against muggles is not just an internal problem with wizarding Britain. You weep with the pain of guilt in not realizing that truth until it was too late; in not doing more to ensure your family's safety.

Harry and Ron try to give you comfort, but they can't relate. Neither can understand the torment of having made a hard sacrifice that ended up being for naught. There is nothing they can say that gives you a sense of true empathy from them. You look around at the group assembled at your parents' funeral; you know your friends love you, but somehow, it's not enough. You can't put a name to your need until you see him standing beneath a nearby elm tree. His blonde hair looks tousled by the blustery wind; his robes whip around him. He knows when you've seen him; you both make eye contact. For a moment, nothing else exists but the two of you; then you see him begin to walk to you in long purposeful strides. He acts like he doesn't notice the stares he's receiving from being there, but you know better. You know he's acutely aware of the notice of others; it's his gift to you that he will not be deterred by it.

When he finally reaches you, he pauses and releases a sigh before he wraps you in his arms. You cling to him, greedily taking what you'd been waiting for subconsciously. The gasps and murmurs around the two of you mean nothing to either of you as you cry on his shoulder.

"Draco," is your mourning chant. Again and again you say it as you purge your soul of its pain. With each breath of his name, he pulls you closer and closer to his body until it is hard to determine where one of you ends and the other begins. Just as your weeping is ending, he tilts your face up and gazes at you. In that moment, you're not concerned with your red and puffy eyes; you don't mind that your face matches them. All you care about is the look of total sympathy you see in his eyes. His hand cradles your face; his thumb tenderly traces your cheekbone before he leans his head down to place a soft kiss on your forehead.

"I'm truly sorry for your loss," he whispers in your ear. Those familiar words, spoken so sincerely, melts something in you. You look at him in speechless wonder, now understanding what had caused the same reaction from him. Choking down a gasp that's a result of this discovery, you blink back tears threatening to return and instead thank him by giving him a kiss.

A real kiss.

He startles against you for a moment; then he returns it with a passion that surprises you. You both recognize the truth of this moment; this season of sorrow will be remembered by the two of you as the pivotal season of change….of healing. Of becoming. Of falling.

When the kiss you share is over, you realize how quiet it's become; that's when you both comprehend the shock you've given your fellow mourners.

For once, you don't care. And apparently, neither does he.
"Hermione? What is this?" Draco called out from inside the lounge. In his hand was a DVD of the old Disney Classic, *Cinderella*.

"What?" she yelled back from her kitchen. Walking back into the living room of her flat, she saw the quizzical look on Draco's face as he held up the square package.

"Oh…that. It's a moving muggle picture," she explained.

Frowning, Draco looked up at her. "But….I thought we had to go the movie district to see those. I…don't understand."

Hermione smiled at her handsome boyfriend. She had taken Draco to the cinema to see *Lord of the Rings – Fellowship of the Ring*; he had been in such awe of the big screen and of the movie itself, it had taken him several weeks to quit talking about it.

"One doesn't have to see a movie in the theater; one can also watch a movie on a DVD player."

Taking the disc from his hand, she said, "My parents gave me a DVD set of the old Disney classics. I watched this animated film when I was a little girl."

Draco grinned. "It's that old, huh?"

"Oh, shush it," Hermione grinned back. "Want to watch it with me now?"

Draco nodded. He could smell the delicious odor of Hermione's roast cooking in her oven, so he said, "As long as the movie's over by dinner. I don't want to take a chance of my favorite meal overcooking."

Hermione laughed. "Well, the beauty of watching a movie at home is being able to stop it whenever one wants. But let's not get into all that," she quickly added when she saw the questions beginning to form on Draco's expressive face. "Let's pop it in."

Soon the couple was cozying up on the couch while watching the film. It didn't take long for Draco to ask, "Was Disney a wizard? I swear that name sounded familiar when you said it earlier and right now, I can't help but see a remarkable resemblance of the stepmother to Posy Parkinson. And Drizella is a dead ringer for Pansy, don't you think?"

Hermione snorted as she laughed, which made Draco laugh, too. "Not to mention the fairy godmother looks alot like Professor Sprout."

"Now that you bring it up, I see it," agreed Draco. "She did pick a pumpkin to transfigure into a carriage. Awfully suspicious, if you ask me. But Hermione…..that incantation? You know that song was no spell."

Then Draco began to sing in a hilarious falsetto voice:

*Salagadoola*
"Well, let's not talk about that now," begged Hermione as she was wiping the tears from her face from laughing so hard at Draco's mocking rendition of the fairy godmother's song. "My favorite part is coming up."

Draco sat down once again to watch the children's fantasy with Hermione. Putting his arm around her, he smiled as she laid her head against his chest. Stroking her soft luxurious curls, he watched as a transformed Cinderella and Prince danced and fell in love all within the space of an evening. He gave a soft inaudible sigh at the ease of their attraction. There were no years of bullying, no war…..no regrets that would cause them agony later. He knew Hermione had forgiven him for how he'd behaved, how he'd been as an arrogant and ignorant young wizard, but still…..sometimes the ache wouldn't leave. Had she really, truly forgotten what he'd been? Had she left it in the past? Draco looked down at his arm where the hateful tattoo was covered by his sleeve. He didn't think he could. Then, as his thoughts began to be chased by his familiar demons of shame and guilt, the words of the song the couple on screen were singing broke through to his mind.

**So this is love, Mmmmmm**

**So this is love**

**So this is what makes life divine**

**I'm all aglow, Mmmmmm**

**And now I know**

**The key to all heaven is mine**

Draco swallowed hard to fight the lump that had suddenly appeared in his throat. It was as if his heart had found a voice of its own and started singing the little song along with the characters. Draco loved Hermione. He'd loved her for some time now. Did she love him? It was hard for him to know. He sighed again. He guessed there was only one way to find out for sure. He was tired of carrying around that little velvet box in his trouser pockets.

"Why do you like the romantic part best, Love?" he suddenly asked Hermione. She looked up at him in surprise as a beautiful blush began to steal its way across her cheeks. She looked down in embarrassment, but Draco was a man on a mission and would not let her escape his gaze. He gently lifted her chin up and asked with obvious adoration and love swirling in his grey eyes, "Shall I show you why?"

Watching him wonderingly as he stood up, Hermione paused for a moment before she took Draco's proffered hand. He kissed her brow and wrapped his arm around her waist as he gently led her in a slow dance around her living room. Drawing her even closer to him, he tightened his hold as he began to croon one of the songs from the movie.

**A dream is a wish your heart makes**
**When you're fast asleep**

*In dreams you will lose your heartache*

**Whenever you wish for you keep**

*You wake with the morning sunlight*

**To find fortune that is smiling on you**

*Don't let your heart be filled with sorrow*

**For all you know tomorrow**

*The dream that you wish will come true*

Hermione had not realized she'd started crying at Draco's earnest singing. He was gazing into her eyes, and the serious look on his face was assuring her he meant every word he was saying. Then he stopped and said, "I know what I wish to keep."

Hermione's breath caught with his next words. "Hermione….I want to wake up each morning, not to see fortune smiling on me….but to see your face next to mine." He took a deep breath and pulled the little box out of his pocket. Opening it up, he held the antique diamond ring out for Hermione to see. Hearing her gasp, he bent down before her on one knee and asked, "You're the only dream I have, Love. You're the only thing I wish for…..so…," He looked up into her shining, honeyed eyes, "Will you have me?"

Nodding her head as her tears made little rivulets down her cheeks, Hermione laughed and cried as she answered, "Yes."

Draco's smile covered his face as he placed the ring on Hermione's finger, and once again began to dance slowly with her.

"I love you, Draco," she whispered in his ear.

Joy the like he'd never known coursed through Draco. Taking Hermione's face in his hands, he stopped in his movement to kiss her passionately.

So caught up in their bliss, the happy couple did not realize they were now the ones being watched. Hermione and Draco had forgotten all about the movie still playing and did not see it when the characters suddenly began to move closer to the edge of the television screen.

"Oh, brave boy! He finally drummed up the nerve to do it!" clapped Cinderella. Beside her, the Prince nodded, pleased to see another happy ending.

"So plebeian. He wasn't raised that way, I'm sure. It must be the company he's chosen to keep. I'm glad his mother didn't have to witness that," sniffed Lady Tremaine in derision. The haughty matron turned to see a figure walking up to her. "Wouldn't you agree with me, Mr. Disney?" she asked.

The smiling man gently shook his head and confessed, "I think it's sweet."

"Well, I thought syrup was going to start pouring from his ears, he was being such a sap," giggled Drizella to her sister.

Jaq and Gus asked the fairy godmother, "What do you think?"
She harrumphed and said, "I think he does a poor imitation of my singing…..that's what I think."

The magical characters laughed with her at that. Then a grin began to bloom on the elder fairy's kind face as she looked at Draco's and Hermione's obvious happiness. "But he did sing the spell, didn't he?" she commented to the crowd around her. Then she murmured to herself, "See? It can do magic….believe it or not."

Bippity-Boppity-Boo.
Chapter 7

Hope

The truth had always been a secret. It had always been well-guarded, both by the positions they had chosen to adopt and by, curiously enough, the prevailing romance novels of this world. Many thought they knew the reason for the Malfoy's silvery blonde hair and their charismatic appeal. Veela similarities had always given them an easy out. Draco had smiled when silly women plied Lucius with questions as to the rumors concerning their lineage. He laughed when these same witches demanded he show them his wings.

If those women only knew.

Draco rubbed his face wearily as he stood near the railing at the top of the astronomy tower. It was easily his favorite spot at Hogwarts. It gave him comfort to see the swirling clouds above him and feel the wind constantly whip through his hair. He had come up there that day to get himself under control. He had not meant to react that way in their potions class. He should have known better than to stay when he saw the glimmering substance shining in the cauldron. Amortentia. The most powerful love potion that smells differently to each person, according to what attracts them. He snorted. He didn't need his nose to tell him what his mind and heart already knew. The innocent whiff of vanilla mixed with the gentlest fragrance of Marvel-of-Peru, the four o'clock flowers that smelled like his true love. He remembered the flower from his long ago visit to South America. He wondered why he'd been so attracted to the subtle fragrance of that unassuming plant. But now he knew why. Because one day she would smell like that flower. And vanilla? He supposed it was why he'd always loved vanilla tea cakes. Why he'd always ordered vanilla ice cream at Fortescue's, even when teased by his friends for being unadventurous in his flavor selections. He would always grin at them, then promptly ignore their jests. Why change a reminder of your heart's desire?

Why indeed. Except it was wrong to begin with. He shouldn't have this desire. He couldn't. It was not allowed. And that was what tormented him.

He stayed for a few minutes more, trying to quiet his mind so he could continue his mission. But just before he turned to leave the tower, the door to the stairway opened. Entering his quiet place was the reason for his unrest. The wind caused Hermione Granger's wild curls to dance about her head. Draco thought it was the most beautiful halo he had ever seen. He noticed when she became aware of his presence; she paused, then straightened her shoulders and came out to where he was standing.

"Malfoy," Hermione nodded, acknowledging his presence.

He said nothing at first, torn between his impulse to be candid and his duty to remain hidden. He was amazed at the strength of the struggle within him. But he craved honesty too much. For once, Draco let down his walls.

"Hello, Hermione," he said softly.

Warm brown eyes looked up into his silvery grey ones. Draco loved looking into her eyes. Warmth, intelligence and kindness flowed from their depths. He now understood why so many songs had been written about a woman's eyes. He felt like he was drowning.

"I saw what happened earlier in class, you know," she said as she gazed at his face. "And I heard the comments. But I don't understand."
Draco felt a gush of madness flow through him. Or was it passion? Whatever it was, he acted on it. He placed his hand over the one of hers that was resting on top of the railing. It was cold. He could remedy that. He curled it into his and entwined their fingers together. Hermione gasped, but Draco noted she didn't pull away.

"I'm tired of pretending," he confessed in a low voice. He watched as she gulped; then he ventured to ask, "Aren't you tired as well?"

"I…I don't know what you mean," she stammered.

"Oh…..I think you do. I think you've known for a while. Or at least guessed."

Hermione's jaw dropped. "How do you….."

Draco chuckled. "You leave behind too much evidence. I've seen the books you've read from the restricted section."

Hermione looked embarrassed. "You don't know what I was doing….I might have been studying to help Harry with….."

"Oh, come now," interrupted Draco. "Harry's fight is with the Dark. You've been studying Light Magic. Spiritual Spells."

Hermione dropped her gaze to the stone floor. "It's just that…you're so…so…"

Draco decided to stop her stuttering. "Hermione…..look at me."

She did as she was told. Then she gasped in wonder. There before her stood Draco, but not Draco. "Oh….my," she breathed. "It's true! You're a…a..an.."

"Angel," he supplied. "It's okay to say it."

Hermione swallowed hard at the sight before her. Draco and his father has always had a silvery glow about their person. More than just their hair, even their skin seemed luminescent with a pearl sheen. But now…it was if he had caught fire from inside and shone with the glory of it. And his wings! His wingspan would probably spread out at least four meters. Hermione ached to touch them.

Draco must have known what she was thinking when he said, "You can if you want to."

Hermione reached out with a trembling hand to smooth over the velvety soft feathers. Draco sucked in his breath at the delightful feelings her timid touch produced.

Still holding her one hand, he brought it up to his mouth and brushed his lips against her knuckles. Hermione instantly felt a jolt of power surge throughout her body. "Why are you here?" she asked, her voice quivering.

"Because of you," he responded. "I was entrusted with your care."

"But….you've been a child! I watched you grow up!"

"I was assigned to you long before you started Hogwarts, Hermione. I had to give the appearance of belonging in this dimension to be able to remain."
She sighed at that admission. It did not escape Draco's notice that she didn't seem too surprised. "And your father? Who I suppose is not actually your father. Oh...and what about Mrs. Malfoy? Is she an angel, too?"

Draco gave Hermione an indulgent grin. "As always, you are both beautiful and correct. Yes, there are many of us here. Actually, you would be surprised at the number of angels assigned to this place and moment in time. It has always been this way for events and people who change the course of the world. As for Lucius and Narcissa, they are my compatriots. We've always worked well together, so we're often assigned nearby cases."

Hermione could not contain her thirst for information. "Who are their cases?"


She sputtered. "Then why are you involved with Voldemort? Why are you a death eater? And don't pretend you're not."

He shook his head. "We maintain an illusion because we have roles to play. But it is only a ruse."

He gave Hermione a cheeky wink. "Even muggle humans know you should keep your friends close and your enemies closer." Then he sobered, warmed by her concerned face. "I appreciate your worry, but there's no need. We know what we're doing. We've been doing it for millennia."

Hermione's face dropped when she was reminded of Draco's eternal nature. "Yes...yes, of course. And you're here...to be my guardian angel."

Draco nodded. "You can call it that, although that's not quite the sum of it. There are those whose function is purely protection. Narcissa is an example of that. But Lucius and I are a hybrid. We are the Warrior Guards. We both fight and protect."

"And you're telling me all this now because..."

Draco's wings dropped a bit. "Because I'm sure I'll soon be reassigned."

"Why?"

"It hurts me to say it," he whispered as he let go of her hand, only to cradle her face with both of his. "But we are not permitted to form bonds with our wards...as I have surely formed one with you." Draco looked down at Hermione's lovely face staring at him with awe and wistful longing. Seeing that, he did what he'd never done before. He disobeyed a rule. Draco tilted Hermione's face up and captured her lips with his. Suddenly his being was filled with a longing and light of which he'd never known. Without his being aware of it, his wings began to flutter. When he felt Hermione's arms wind around his neck, he moaned and deepened the kiss. Draco had never felt such overwhelming rapture.

"My pure, little dove..." he murmured in adoration. "Amabo vos in aeternum."

"Draco," she whispered against his soft lips. "Tell me I'm not dreaming."

"If I am dreaming, let me never awake. If I am awake, let me never sleep," he quoted. Hermione hummed against his lips in agreement.

Ending the kiss was the hardest thing Draco had ever done. Reluctantly pulling away, he said, "Now I see why attachments are not allowed. One would never think of anything else."
Hermione gave him a look of pure joy. "Draco…..um…..is that your real name?"

Kissing her forehead, he nodded. "Oddly enough, it is. Many of us took on the human names of the constellations we helped form."

That tidbit of information momentarily boggled Hermione's mind. She blinked, trying to clear her thoughts. "Right, then….well, let's talk about that later. But circling back to what you said about not being allowed to form a bond...are you sure? I mean, I'm certainly not trying to imply I'm the last word when it comes to the commands of the Almighty, but I don't believe God would keep any of his creation lonely and longing for something they couldn't have."

"Please. Don't tempt me any more than I already am. My kind were given power. Perhaps that was supposed to be enough. Maybe we weren't meant to receive anything else."

"Oh, what utter nonsense," Hermione huffed. "If you can feel it, you were meant for it."

Draco seemed unsure.

"God is Love, Draco," Hermione's voice was soft and tender. "It would be against his nature to deprive any of his creation of what He is."

Draco shifted on his feet, obviously uncomfortable with thinking outside his 'angel' box. "But it has always been spoken; always passed down the ranks that relations with humans are forbidden."

"Oh yeah? Says who?"

That gave Draco pause. "I…." he looked at Hermione with a gobsmacked expression. "I do not know." His eyes began to take on a glow when presented with a legitimate question.

Hermione drew his body closer to hers. "Sometimes what is customary can become what is expected. But that doesn't mean it's always right." She looked up at the handsome face above her. "Let's just have faith that loving is never wrong."

Draco looked down at the witch wrapped in his strong arms. Arms that had fought in many a battle over the eons of time but had never before until that day experienced a lover's embrace. Because of the girl in his arms, he could now understand so much of what he'd only been a witness to before.

Hermione had asked him to have faith. He could, because he now knew love.

And for the first time in his long, eternal existence, he felt hope.

**AN:** Three things will last forever - faith, hope, and love - and the greatest of these is love. This drabble is my nod to one of my all-time favorite movies, the old black and white holiday classic, *The Bishop's Wife*. Cary Grant was the angel in that movie who fell in love with a human woman. He had to leave her (she was already married anyway...hence the movie title) so I wanted a happier ending for our angel in this story.

But Cary Grant. An Angel. Oh Lawdy.

Can my guardian angel look like him? LOL

Note – *Amabo vos in aeternum* is supposed to mean *I will love you forever* in Latin. I suppose if
anyone could truthfully promise that, it would be an immortal being.
Chapter 8

When His Father Heard About It - Part I

"I know you're there. You might as well come in and be comfortable," Narcissa said. Lucius agreed. There was no longer any point in skulking by the door. He walked into the smaller study of his wife’s. Sitting down in the Queen Anne chair closest to the fireplace, he said, "That was Severus, wasn't it?"

Narcissa nodded. "I imagine you heard him. Even in a fire call, his voice is unique."

"It always has been."

For a moment, neither said anything. Then they both blurted out their thoughts at once.

"Are you sure?"

"I never thought…""

"What?" they both asked together.

Lucius cleared his throat. "You were saying, my dear?"

Narcissa nervously fiddled with the top button of her blouse. "Severus said Draco was finally successful. He actually did it, Lucius."

"About bloody time," he huffed. "I was beginning to think the boy didn't have it in him."

Narcissa gave her husband a look. "There's no need to disparage our son. He's been under a lot of pressure."

"Most of it self-induced. When I was his age….""

"When you were his age, you didn't face the same obstacles. It was a simpler time."

Letting out an indignant huff, he said, "I do wish you wouldn't speak of our youth as if it was centuries ago. You make it sound as if I was a doddering old man with one foot in the grave."

"Hardly. You're a fine specimen of a wizard in the prime of his life."

Lucius sniffed, somewhat appeased at his wife's praise. "Did Severus say anything else?"

"He assured me that Draco covered his tracks. No one saw him. No one as yet suspects."

"No one?" Lucius didn't appear convinced. "Is he certain?"

"That's what he said. I….I trust his judgement. I have to."

There was another still pause between the couple. Finally, Lucius slapped his knee and said, "Well then……it's time I talk to Draco. I can use him in the coming days."

"Oh, Lucius….so soon? Can't you give our poor son a rest? He's already proven where his
allegiance lies."

Lucius smiled indulgently. "All right, Cissy. I suppose a few days more won't matter. Although I can just imagine his surprise when he finds out the truth."

That comment earned him a grin from his wife. "Please let me be there when you tell him."

They both chuckled at that; then Lucius said, "I expect he will try to avoid me for awhile; I can't see him wanting to tell me about his...what do they call it these days?...with Miss Granger."

"Do you mean relationship? Or are you referring to his being in love?"

"I was thinking more of what Severus caught them doing in his storeroom."

Narcissa actually snorted. "I think the word you're groping for is snogging."

"Let's pray I'm the only one doing that."

"Doing what, dear?"

"Groping."

Narcissa made a face. "Please. I don't want to think of my boy that way."

"Your boy is old enough to make boys of his own. However, I think he's an honorable lad. We shan't have to worry about that. At least, I hope not...not until all this is over."

Wanting to change the subject, Narcissa said, "What I can't imagine is Draco thinking we wouldn't notice his feelings for the witch. He might have been able to fool his friends, but his own parents? Did he think we were blind?"

"Perhaps. You know how young people are."

"True. Let's see...I'm trying to recall when it first started. Wasn't it sometime during his first year?"

"Try the first week of his first year."

Narcissa smiled at Lucius' keen memory. "Ah...you remember, then."

"You have to admit his first letter home was hard to forget. His description of Miss Granger's hair amused me for weeks."

Narcissa laughed. "Do you remember when he came home during the holidays, complaining about her being such a show-off? Just because her marks were higher than his."

Lucius sighed. "I only remember how hard it was to play my part. Having to slur Ms. Granger's name when I wanted to chide my own child for his petulance." Looking into his wife's warm eyes he confessed, "I think that's been the hardest part in all this. Living a lie before our child so he couldn't inadvertently reveal our true natures."

That instantly silenced Narcissa's mirth. Putting a thin hand over his large one, she said, "I know, my love. I know it was. My greatest fear was that he would grow up to be the thing we pretended. But be comforted. In spite of the roles we have had to play, our son has done well. Today, he revealed his good judgement and finally followed his heart."
"Did Severus say how Miss Granger responded?"

Narcissa smirked. "By his account, it was mutual. It does take two to tango, as the Muggles say, and Severus said she's always been the type to give as much as she gets. Whether it's insults…..or….."

"Kisses," Lucius finished for her. "Passionate, is she? She'll be well-suited for our son."

"We've always known that, dear. But she's also discreet. Her friendship with Draco is one she's kept hidden from her friends. From what I understand, she and Draco have been meeting privately for some time after she caught him comforting a first year Hufflepuff who had been bullied. Apparently, that act of compassion softened her heart toward our son."

"Ah. I'd wondered what had been the catalyst in the change in their relationship."

"Severus said she's been talking to Draco about leaving us and joining the Order."

Lucius nodded. "And today?"

"Severus said today Draco told her he would. That's what started the….."

"Snogging?"

Narcissa cleared her throat. "The exchanging of affections."

Lucius grinned, then sighed once more. "It's Friday. I will give Draco tonight and tomorrow to enjoy his newfound freedom. But before Monday, I want to talk to him."

"You know he will not be himself at first. I doubt he'll even look you in the eye."

Lucius acknowledged that truth, but said, "I know. But it's time he knew the truth about our….."

He said, " assignment " the same time Narcissa uttered, " position."

"...in the Order." he finished for them both. "Which will be his responsibility, too, going forward."

"All right. I'll let Severus know."
Draco’s eyes turned hard. "Is that all?"

Severus nodded. He watched as Draco whirled around and stormed out of his office. He had no doubt what Draco's next action would be; he'd find a way to tell Hermione this conversation.

He had no doubt she'd come to his rescue; the resourceful chit would manage to spirit Draco away under her oblivious friend's noses to Order Headquarters before the weekend was over.

And he had no doubt that Draco would be surprised to find Lucius Malfoy waiting for him there to share a life-changing conversation.

His father had heard about his secret. Now it was Draco's turn to hear about his family's.
"They're not going to believe me."
"Yes, they will."
"They won't accept me."
"Of course they will."
"No, they won't."
"Gah! Will you stop with all the negativity? Draco, *they will.*"

The doubtful look on Draco's face changed to one of hurt.
"You don't have to get mad, Hermione."

She sighed in exasperation. "I'm not! Okay....you know what? I can't make you believe me. You'll just have to see for yourself."

Hermione and Draco were talking in furious whispers behind a curtain in one of the many alcoves at Hogwarts. After dancing around their mutual attraction for the other for the past few months, earlier that day they had finally given expression to their desires. But their bliss had been short-lived; Professor Snape had caught them fervently snogging in his potions storeroom and had ordered them both to their common rooms. After Hermione had left, he'd detained Draco and asked him what he thought he was doing. Draco had stammered and stuttered. Inwardly, Severus tutted; they boy would need to be a better liar than that if he was to help his father in his work. Giving the red-faced lad a look of disdain, he had sent him off after telling him he needed to think hard on the choices before him. Hardly an hour had passed when the surly professor called Draco back into his office to pass on a directive from his father.

Come home.

Draco knew what had happened; Snape had told his father about catching Hermione and him in the throes of passion. That's why his father was ordering him back to the Manor. He cringed thinking of what would be in store for him once he got there; his father's displeasure would be severe. Worst of all, his parents may think an extreme measure might be needed to ensure Draco to stay on the path he'd been put upon from the moment of his birth.

Would his father pressure him into an engagement to one of the Greengrass girls? Or worse, would he force Draco to marry Pansy Parkinson? Draco would not have opposed a union with Daphne or Astoria had his mind and heart not already been set on Hermione, but *Pansy*? Draco shuddered. Pansy would be a cruel punishment. Loud, abrasive, not an attractive feature on her, being bound to Pansy would be Draco's idea of hell on earth.

No, wait. That wasn't right. Inflicting Pansy on him would not be the *worst* thing his father could
do. True hell on earth would be the other punishment his father could impose on him. Depending on how upset his father was, he might insist on Draco taking the Dark Mark.

The more he thought about it, the more Draco feared that probable outcome. He could imagine how it would play out….his father ordering him home for a family dinner, only to find out dinner was a code word for evil tattoo party.

Once there, Draco would have no way out that would not result in very grave consequences, not only for him but for his family. Particularly his mother. Draco knew he couldn't chance that. The solution was simple; he couldn't, wouldn't go home. He would have to, for the first time in his life, disobey a direct command from his father. He would have to act on what he earlier told Hermione he'd do…..

...he would have to join the Order.

After Draco had successfully contacted Hermione and told her of his dilemma, he began to have misgivings. Would the Order accept him? Probably not. With his pedigree, why should they? They certainly wouldn't trust him. However, Hermione would not listen to his doubts and told him where to meet her on Sunday morning. To Harry and Ron she would say she was going down to the boat dock to study, whereas in reality she would be meeting Draco just outside the gates of Hogwarts to apparate together to 12 Grimmauld Place to meet with the Order. She told Draco she'd already sent an owl to Alastor Moody to gather the Order members there for an interview with a wizard who wanted to enlist. She told Draco she didn't tell them who it was; he didn't know if that made it better or worse. Maybe it would have been better if they knew they were about to see son of death eater Lucius Malfoy at their door; or maybe Hermione was right when she said it wouldn't matter to them…..they would never turn down a wizard in need. Hermione had listened to his fears until she couldn't stand it anymore and had shut down the conversation by saying, "Just be outside the gates at nine; I'll take it from there."

Sunday morning arrived, clear and bright, not something that was often seen by those living in the Scottish Highlands. To Hermione, it portended good tidings for Draco that day; for Draco, however, it just meant he might be more easily recognized, his bright blonde hair shining, a beacon in the morning light, making him all the more conspicuous to any passerby.

Hermione shook her head at her boyfriend's nervousness, but she understood from where it stemmed. It must be a hard thing to go against a lifetime of indoctrination. Seeing Draco's trembling hands, she found herself once again despising Lucius Malfoy.

"Put your arms around me," she said.

"Just can't get enough of this fabulousness, can you?" Draco quipped in an attempt at humor. Hermione grinned at her boyfriend before giving his nose a soft peck. "Save it for later, Lover Boy. You can give me a raincheck."

"A raincheck? On a day like today?" Draco asked, the muggle term confusing him as the day was so sunny.

'Nevermind. Just hold me."

Draco did as he was instructed and a moment later, found himself on the doorstep of his Great-Aunt Walburga's home. "This is the headquarters of the Order?" he asked in astonishment.
Hermione nodded. "Sirius gave it to the Order to use." She reached over to bang the hammered metal door knocker. Together they listened as the steady beat of footsteps drew near. Then they heard the deadbolt being unlocked. Draco and Hermione suddenly found themselves in front of their former professor, Remus Lupin. He gave Draco an enigmatic stare; a few seconds passed before he moved aside to let them in. "Everyone is already here," he said as he motioned for them to follow him.

Walking down the hallway, Draco noted that not much had been changed; the house looked as dreary as it ever had.

Remus paused before he opened the doors to the kitchen. "Are you ready?" he asked Draco.

This was it. The moment that would change his life forever. Nervously swallowing, Draco grabbed Hermione's hand, then looked the werewolf in the eye. "Yes, Sir. I am."

This time Remus smiled warmly. "Good man. Well then, shall we get on with it?" With that, he pushed wide the double door to reveal a group sitting around a massive wooden table.

"The Order of the Phoenix," he said, gesturing to the group before him. Draco looked around the table. Some faces he knew; others he didn't. It was no surprise to see the Headmaster there, smiling broadly at him, his eyes twinkling with unsuppressed delight.

"And who might you be, Laddie?" asked an elderly witch sitting by Molly Weasley. Before Draco could respond, a voice spoke from a far corner on the other end of the room. "He is my son."

Both Draco and Hermione gasped. They watched as the tall form of Lucius Malfoy walked out of the shadows to stop beside the massive fireplace occupying most of the space in the wall next to them.

"Father?" Draco couldn't believe what he was seeing.

"Draco," he nodded. "I.....I can't tell you how long I have longed for this moment," his eyes eloquently expressing the truth of that statement.

"No more than I," another voice joined in. Draco turned his head to see his aristocratic mother step out of the pantry with a tea cosy in hand to cover the teapot presiding over the table.

For a moment, no one moved. No one spoke. It was the loudest quiet Draco had ever experienced. He frowned in confusion, unknowingly allowing his face to become hard. Misinterpreting that look, Narcissa made a queer little choking sound, shattering the silence. "Draco... please."

That was all it took for the spell to be broken. Draco rushed over to his mother, wrapping his strong arms around her. "Mum," he said brokenly, hugging his mother with all he had. Lucius moved over to the two and placed a hand on each head. For a moment all one could hear in the room were the soft sounds of love coming from mother and son.

"There, there," Lucius finally said after a few minutes had passed. Pulling out a handkerchief from his pocket, he gave it to his wife. "No need to drown him, Cissy. I'm sure Draco has many questions he wants answered."

Mother and Son quickly wiped their eyes of the inconvenient moisture that had accumulated there.

"What a pair of jellies," grumbled Mad Eye from his place at the table.

"Let them be, Alastor," said Kingsley Shacklebolt. "It's not often that a family has this joyous a
reunion."

"I….I don't understand any of this," Draco said.

Lucius clasped his shoulder. "Your mother and I joined the Order before you were born."

"But…..but….."

"We were given the task of collecting intelligence against the enemy."

If Draco hadn't been gobsmacked before, he was now. "You've…..been spies against….. the Dark Lord? All this time?"

Lucius nodded. "Even when others thought him dead, we knew better. Your mother and I believed it would only be a matter of time until he once again became a threat. So we prepared. We played our parts while gathering information that might be helpful for the Order later on. Since his return, we've had to be even more diligent."

"Then why….. why didn't you tell me?"

Regret showed on the proud man's face. "Son….please understand. It would have been too great a burden for you to hide at so young an age. We couldn't take that chance."

Draco stood there, swallowing repeatedly, each fist a ball.

"Well, are you going to just stand there gulping as if a bowtruckle was stuck in your throat?" asked a familiar voice from the other darkened corner. A familiar snarky voice.

"Pro….Professor Snape?"

"Who did you expect? The Queen, perhaps?" Severus chided as he moved into the light.

"You're a spy, too?"

Severus curled his lip. "Obviously."

Draco whirled around to look at Hermione. "Did you know all this?"

Hermione shook her head. "Only about the Professor….but not about your parents."

"Well then, it's time I remedied that." Lucius walked over to where Hermione was still standing by the door. "Lucius Malfoy, Wizarding London Liaison to Scotland Yard and Secret Intelligence Agent for the Order, at your service, Ma'am." Bowing, he took her hand and placed a kiss on the back of it. "Thank you, my dear," he said in a soft voice. "Thank you for bringing our son to us."

Hermione looked as flabbergasted as Draco. "You mean……you don't mind? Me? Uh, I mean, us? Being together, that is?"

Lucius grinned while motioning his wife over. "We were counting on it. Ever since the day we received a letter from our son containing nothing other than a description of the, and I quote, 'Snotty Swotty', we knew our son had found his match."

The wizards and witches sitting at the table overhearing the conversation chuckled at that.

Hermione crossed her arms in front of her chest. "Really now, Draco….. snotty swotty ?"
He sheepishly shrugged his shoulders. "What can I say? I was only eleven."

"Never mind that, Darling," Narcissa said, placing her arm around Hermione's waist. "That's all in the past. What's important is now. Since you're here, you and Draco can be briefed."

"Briefed? On what?" asked Draco.

"Why, on what your positions will be in the Order. I'll be counting on both of you in the days to come," explained Lucius as the other members made room for them around the table.

As they sat down in the places emptied for them, Hermione bumped Draco's shoulder with hers and said, "All that needless worrying, Draco." Then she smirked in triumph at her boyfriend. "Told you they'd accept you."

Draco put his hand over her knee. Only to reach over to pinch the tender skin on the side of it. "Know-it-all," he muttered out of the corner of his mouth, grinning when Hermione jumped.

Lucius and Narcissa couldn't help but laugh at the two.
Chapter 10

Bad Guys

"Woo-hoo! Here they come!" shouted Lyra gleefully, her eyes on the television screen as the cowboys rode into town. Turning to her father she smirked, "I told you Marshall Cody would find a posse to help him, Daddy."

Draco smiled back at his daughter. His greatest enjoyment was not in watching the old black and white westerns but in seeing how much enjoyment Lyra got out of them.

"Don't crow yet, Lyra. The bank robbers are still at large," advised her grandfather, sitting beside her. "They just might get away."

That was an additional joy for Draco; to see his father, the infamous Lucius Malfoy, engrossed in a classic muggle TV show. Draco was hard put to hide his laughter when Lucius started talking to the screen as if the characters could hear him.

"Idiots…..could you pick a more obvious place to hide?" A few seconds later, he added, "And for the love of Merlin, would you shut up, man? They'll hear you."

Lucius' complaint was directed to the main villain who was in the middle of a tirade because his assistant had misplaced one of the bags of money.

"Now is not the time for that. Do it when you make it out of town."

Unfortunately, the ringleader paid no attention to Lucius' comments and continued to rail against his cohort. This did not improve his current audience's opinion of him.

Snorting contemptuously, Lucius muttered, "You sound like a screeching fishwife. Someone needs to cast a silencio on you."

Lyra giggled. "They're not magical, Grandfather. None of them can cast. Besides, they're supposed to get caught. They're the bad guys."

Lucius looked at Lyra strangely, but refrained from offering any other critique regarding the incompetency of the outlaws.

Before long, a gunfight erupted in front of the livery stable.

"Pow, pow, pow!" yelled Lyra while pointing her finger at the TV.

"Violent child you're raising, Granger," Draco said to the witch who had just walked into the room.

Hermione gave her husband a look. "Me? You're the one watching this with her."

Just then, the Marshall blasted his way to the bandits' hiding place.

"BOOM!" shrieked Lyra when the door blew apart.

"Shush, Lyra...you'll wake up your brother," said Hermione as she sat down by Draco. "It took me forever to get Scorpius to sleep."
After a minute or two of watching the program, Hermione chuckled. Shaking her head, she said, "I honestly don't see how you three can enjoy this. I can't tell who's good from who's not."

"The bad guys scowl more," said Draco.

"And apparently bathe less," Lucius added in a droll tone.

Lyra turned around to look at the adults in the room. Putting her small hands on her equally small hips, she huffed. "Nuh-uh. That's not how you know."

Smiling indulgently at his daughter, Draco said, "Then tell us, Pumpkin."

With an exasperated face that was pure Hermione, she said, "The bad guys wear the bananas."

Draco chuckled. "Bandana, Sweetheart."

Lyra ignored him. "See?" she walked up close to the TV and pointed to one of Dastardly Dan's men. "Every time they rob a bank they pull their ba..ban...danana up. You know what that means, don't you?"

Without waiting for a response, she said, "Bad guys always cover their faces. Good guys don't."

The silence in the room after that artless remark was deafening.

Hermione's eyes darted to her father-in-law. Lucius' cheeks were flaming in embarrassment and with a deeper emotion……shame. The old sinner knew quite well the truth of Lyra's statement. As a death eater, Lucius had been a terror to all on the side of the light until the Dark Lord made the mistake of executing Narcissa. Never having loved a woman before, Tom Riddle had not realized what the loss of his wife would do to his faithful follower. Lucius had taken Draco and together, they'd gone straight to the Order. Turning himself in, he supplied them with information that had been key to Voldemort's defeat. After the war and because of his massive contribution in aiding the Order, Lucius was acquitted of his former crimes……but that didn't mean he didn't deal with them. On the contrary. Since Lucius often visited them, Hermione knew firsthand the nightmares he battled on a regular basis. And in most of them, he was wearing his mask.

Because as his half-blooded granddaughter had so wisely pointed out, that's what bad guys always did.

Just before the silence became too uncomfortable, Lyra said, "This is the sad part coming up."

Hermione looked away from Lucius to see what her daughter was talking about. "What darling?"

"This part here. Marshall Cody's gonna have to arrest his brother."

"You've already seen this show, Lyra?" asked Draco.

She nodded. "Don't you remember, Mummy?"

Hermione shook her head, honestly perplexed. But then, Lyra had watched so many episodes of the American series, they'd all started to run together in her mind.

"See......Marshall Cody used to be a bad guy, too. But then he got hurt. While he was at the hospital, a preacher came and talked to him. When he got out, he decided he didn't want to be bad anymore so he became a Marshall instead."

"You mean to tell me…….Dastardly Dan is Marshall Cody's brother?" asked Lucius.
Lyra nodded her head. "Uh-huh. And Marshall Cody used to be bad, just like him. But he changed. Now he's the bestest good guy there is!"

"Why is he the 'bestest', Lyra?" asked Draco softly while keeping an eye on his father's face.

"Mummy 'splained it to me. It's easier to be good if that's all you've been. But to change to good when you've been bad, takes.....takes..."

"Takes courage, Lyra," said Hermione. She reached over and took Lucius' hand and gave it a loving squeeze.

"Uh-huh. And that's what makes them the bestest." Turning back around to the TV, Lyra said, "Ooh....I forgot this part...."

While she watched the show, she had no idea of the tender looks that were going on behind her. Then she giggled. "Marshall Cody's about to get kissed by the school teacher...."

The adults all watched as the brave lawman did indeed get snogged by the comely schoolmarm.

"Another happy ending!" chirped Lyra. Just as she was about to skip out of the room, she turned around and said, "Oh! And......that's another way you can tell a good guy..."

"What way is that, child?" asked Lucius, once again looking relaxed. And at peace.

"The good guy always gets kissed in the end!"

"He does, indeed," murmured Hermione as she leaned over and gave her father-in-law an affectionate buss on his cheek. Then remembering there was more than one good guy in the room, she gave her husband a convincing confirmation of her belief in his worth.

Afterwards, Draco smirked and quipped to his father, "Well, if we go according to the pattern of these shows, I believe it's now time for us to ride off into the sunset." Clearing his throat, he drawled, "Ain't that right, Pa?"

The corners of Lucius' mouth twitched upward, betraying his amusement at hearing his son's posh, aristocratic voice attempting a cowboy twang. Quirking an eyebrow, he asked, "Is that so? Well, then.....saddle up. Yee-haw!"

---

*AN: This is my nod to my own childhood. When I was very young, Westerns were the rage. Bonanza, Maverick, Wagon Train, to name just a few and of course, the Granddaddy of them all, Gunsmoke. Like Lyra, I loved the simple characters of those shows and discovered early on that our couch made an excellent pony whenever my mom would leave the room.*
Chapter 11

Reunion

He was standing there, waiting. Hermione gasped. It had been too long since she had seen the love of her life. He was more handsome than she remembered. Even at a distance, she could see the way the soft breeze gently played with the strands of hair that fell across his brow. She marveled that the twinkle in his grey eyes had not been diminished by their long absence from each other.

Crying out in aching need and longing, she ran over to where he stood beneath a flowering hawthorn tree.

"Finally," he murmured as he gathered her tightly in his arms. "I finally have you again."

"Draco," she cried in joy and wonder. "Is…is this real? Can this really be happening? Or…is this another dream?"

"It's real this time, Love," he said comfortingly. Then he murmured, "Hermione?"

She looked up at the sound of her name, spoken in that soft voice that always left her breathless.

Draco gently took her chin and tilted it at an angle. Then he lowered his head and caught her lips with his. The kiss he gave her was passionate. Hermione felt herself melting under the strength of his desire for her.

"There," he grinned smugly when he let her go. "Admit it. Your imagination could never have come up with something as good as that."

Hermione laughed and cried at the same time. "I've missed you so," she said, her tears wetting his shoulder.

Stroking her hair, Draco comforted his wife. "Shh, Love. That's behind us now. Let the past go."

Then a thought hit him. "Would you like to see our new home? Well…new to you, anyhow."

"Of course."

Draco led her up a beaten path into a well-tended garden. Green of a vibrant shade one would never see in Britain carpeted their path. Beautiful flowers of every color bordered the yard.

"Oh…..Draco," Hermione murmured as she looked around. "It's more beautiful than I ever imagined."

"Wait until you see the house," he said excitedly, a delightful expectancy shining on his handsome face. "You're going to love it."

He paused when they finally came to the edge of the yard. Before them was a cliff. A peninsula jutted out into a cobalt sea. There, situated in the middle of the outcropping was the prettiest cottage Hermione had ever seen.

"Do you like it?" he asked softly.

Hermione tried to hold back her hair as it whipped about her head from the continual gusts of wind. Beautiful waves danced below them before crashing into the rocks. Seagulls cried out their songs
above them. The sun sparkled like diamonds on the water.

"Oh….my….." Hermione was speechless.

"I was asked, you know. About the kind of house we would want. I….I didn't think you'd want a
manor. So I chose this cottage. You know why, right?"

She nodded, too overcome with happiness to speak. They had spent their honeymoon nestled in a
cottage like the one before them. It too, had overlooked a sea.

"It's perfect," she finally said.

Draco smiled, relieved. Kissing her once again, he said, "As much as I would like to show you
around inside it, there are a few more things you need to see first."

Hermione nodded. Her joy at being with Draco again made her feel near to bursting. And with it
was another happiness, too. One she couldn't quite put her finger on. But it was pervasive and all-
encompassing. A sense of well-being. Then she realized what it was. It was peace. Total and
complete peace.

She looked up at Draco, about to question him about it, but he gave his head a little shake. "I know.
But it's not for me to answer. Come with me, Love. Soon you'll understand."

Taking her hand, he intertwined her fingers with his. She noted absently that his were no longer
twisted with the painful arthritis that had crippled them before. He led her down a sandy path to the
water's edge. Giving her a wink, he indicated they should both step into the sea. Suddenly, in fact,
so quickly Hermione had not seen how it'd happened, they were across the ocean to another shore.

"Well….that certainly beats being side-alonged," she remarked drolly. Draco laughed out loud at
that. Hermione couldn't remember the last time she'd seen her husband laugh so heartily.

Wait….what was that?

An image suddenly filled her mind of a much older Draco laughing with his…great-grandchildren
on his knees? Then another image filled her mind. This one was of Draco speaking to a healer. Of
the healer shaking his head while putting his hand sympathetically on Draco's shoulder. Of
Hermione, aged and withered, crying. Then an image rushed over that one. It was of herself,
dressed in black and crying over a coffin.

Image after image filled Hermione's mind. Of the hard years, thankfully few in number, after
Draco's death. Of her loneliness. Of her sorrow. Of her waiting….and wishing. And missing…oh,
the horrible missing, the ache of it so intense at times that she prayed for death. For release from
the pain.

The final image that she saw was of her in a bed. Her family was around her. A minister came to
offer a prayer and speak to the family. Then all left but one. Her youngest granddaughter, now a
grown witch with children of her own. She began to softly hum to Hermione her favorite song. It
had been the one that she and Draco had danced to at their wedding.

Then her granddaughter leaned over and whispered, "Granny...if you hear him calling you, it's
okay to go."

Hermione drifted in and out after that. Then a voice woke her. She thought it was her grandson at
first. But then she heard, "It's time, Love. Come back to me."
She opened her eyes. Her final vision was of Draco under the tree, waiting for her to join him.

She blinked then, seeing Draco watch her intently as she relived the last moments of her life.

"Do you understand now, Hermione?" he asked softly.

She paused. "I'm....I'm dead now, right?"

"No," a cheerful, triumphant voice nearby said. "Now you're truly alive. The nightmare is over. Joy has come in the morning."

After that, it became so bright, it rather was hard to see. Hermione found herself squinting, a hand over her eyes to shield them from the living light around her and Draco. It was as if the sun had come close to shine on all who had gathered to greet Hermione. But she was able to make out some of the faces. Some brought surprise; others brought tears of joy. She saw many who had gone on before her. Her parents, Dumbledore, Professor McGonagall, Fred and George, reunited once again, Sirius, and then beside Sirius was… Oh, It was Harry. She choked back a cry. The last time she'd seen him was after he'd been taken to St. Mungo's after suffering a heart attack. He looked boyish, with a mischievous twinkle in his eye.

"Hey, 'Mione," he said with a wave. "Sure you want your cottage to be over on the Slytherin shore? It's prettier here."


She saw they all stood in front of a massive castle that rose up high into the clouds. A castle that looked strangely familiar, with a lake that connected to the sea on one side and a deep forest on another. She was trying to remember where she'd seen a place like that before when she saw a little hut on the side of a hill. The door to the hut suddenly opened and a massive, hairy person stepped out of it.

"Mione!" Hagrid called out in delight. "'Bout time you came, young'un. Draco here had jus' about driven us spare with his impatience to have you with 'em."

Hermione was just trying to puzzle out how she could hear Hagrid from such a distance when Draco whispered in her ear, "We were all waiting for you. And now you're here.

Welcome home, Love."

AN: Those of you who know my story, know the reason I wrote this. It just sort of poured out of me.

I borrowed thoughts from CS Lewis at the end. Those being that our life here is the dream; heaven is the reality. Also, that the reason we love the earth is because it is a type, a copy of the real thing in heaven. If you want to read more of those themes, read The Last Battle, book 7 in the Chronicles of Narnia by CS Lewis.
Twins

Fidgeting…..fighting anxious thoughts…..counting the minutes. That was all he could do. Draco felt helpless in the aptly-named waiting room at St. Mungo's. He looked at the bleary grey decor. He was having a hard time swallowing. He could swear those blasted walls were creeping up inch by inch, closing in on him. His eyes felt hot and scratchy; he wished he could cry. It would make him feel better. But Draco knew tears didn't come just by the wishing of them. At least, not for him. Others were luckier. Harry Potter evidently didn't have any trouble letting his emotions out. Neither apparently did his eternal sidekick, Ron Weasley. They were both standing by the water cooler, each with an arm around the other in a show of support and commiseration. Hermione was their best friend. But she was infinitely more than that to Draco.

_I should have told her how I felt. Why didn't I?_

Draco couldn't lie to himself; he knew why. Because he was still a stinking coward. Because he didn't think she'd believe him.

Because he wouldn't be able to bear her pitied rejection.

They had become friendly, something that was unavoidable really, seeing how they were partners in the Auror department; yet he'd never let on how hopelessly in love he was with the muggleborn.

This is all my fault .

He thought their assignment that day would be easy. It _had_ been easy. The convict had been easily captured. Draco thought he was contained. He'd not seen him rise up on one elbow to cast a wandless hex. Draco had turned his back on the prisoner for just a second to ask Hermione a question; he couldn't even remember now what it had been. All he could replay in his mind was Hermione's beautiful face grimacing in shocked pain when the spell hit her. The sound of her whimper and then an anguish, choking gurgle as she coughed up her own blood. His own enraged cry as he whirled around to avada the wizard who had done this to his secret love, only to find him dead by his own hand. Draco avada'd him anyway, hot tears falling furiously from his eyes. Then he heard a dull thud as Hermione's body collapsed to the ground. The bloodlust clouding his mind turned to ice in his veins. He hurriedly scooped her into his arms and apparated with her to the hospital. Once there, he fired off a patronus to Potter.

The healer on duty commended him on his quick thinking, casting a stasis charm on Hermione's wound, thereby keeping the spell from spreading and preventing further blood loss, but it was small comfort to Draco. He didn't think he'd ever forget the sight of Hermione's face, small and ashen, as she came to. Her fingers trembled as she reached up to trace his cheek.

"Thank you," she whispered, her hand coming away damp with his tears.

The healers took over then. They'd made him leave. They'd insisted he stay out of their way. They'd consigned him to one of the Circles of Hades; he was sure of it. Waiting had to be an infernal punishment.

And he'd not seen her since.

That had been four hours ago. Four hours of wondering…..four hours of being afraid……four
hours of his heart breaking in two.

Four hours of deciding that if he was given another chance, he wouldn't waste it.

He would tell Hermione he loved her.

Wearily dragging his hands through his hair, Draco sighed. He glanced over at Potter again. The dark-haired wizard was staring at him, a knowing look in his eye. Draco watched Harry give Ron one more pat on the shoulder. Then his one-time nemesis walked over to where he sat. He clapped his shoulder and murmured, "I know Mate. I know."

Draco startled at that declaration. What *exactly* did he know?

"I….I don't know what you mean," he hedged.

In spite of his worry, Harry snorted. "Right. You don't know anything about how you've been in love with my best friend since the war was over. And don't bother denying it. You can't fool me."

"You're blooming barmy," Draco muttered.

Harry gave him a small smile. "Have it your way, then. But just so you know….I think the feeling is mutual."

Draco saw the sincerity in Harry's face. His heart leaped with the hope Harry's words gave him. Maybe Hermione would give him a chance.

That is, if she pulled through this.

Just then the door to the waiting room opened. The healer who had been on call when Draco brought in Hermione stepped out. "Auror Granger is stabilized now," were the first words out of his mouth.

Draco sagged in relief.

"Can we see her?" asked Ron.

The healer nodded at the three wizards in front of him. "Follow me."

As he led them through the corridor, Harry grimaced at the sound of pain coming from patients within the different rooms. Ron squinched up his nose at the bad smells. But Draco noticed none of it, so intent was he in seeing Hermione.

The healer stopped when he came to the double doors of a room that was different than the others. "This is the CCC, or Critical Curse Chamber. Only patients afflicted with spells most foul stay here. When they improve, they are assigned a room of their own." He paused. "I can only give you a few minutes with her. Although we have neutralized the curse, she still sustained significant internal damage. She is not out of the woods yet. No loud noises. And if you've recently been prescribed with Pepper-Up potion, I will have to ask for you to wait outside."

"We're all well," Harry assured the man. "I promise."

"Very well." The healer opened the door to a room that looked alien to the young aurors. Strange huffing balloons were floating above Hermione's bed, reminding Ron of the dirigible plums of the Lovegood's. A charmed cauldron was nearby, emitting a bluish smoke that hung around Hermione's head to better enable her to breathe the healing fumes. Quick quills were busy
scratching on the levitated sheets of parchment, notating Hermione's vitals. But the oddest sight was the intermittent flashes of green that were coming from Hermione herself.

Draco eyed it cautiously. "Is that the curse leaving?"

The healer looked up to see what Draco was talking about. "If you are referring to the flashes, then no…..that's Miss Granger's magic. It's signaling for help from its twin."

Harry frowned. "Come again?"

The healer looked over his bifocals at the famous young wizard. "Your friend sustained a serious injury. As such, it's natural her magic would seek out its twin to help with expediting the healing. We see it all the time with our critical cases. Its an instinctive reaction from their core. Comparable to what muggles used to refer to as an SOS."

"Seriously?" asked Draco. "It's not that…..I mean, I've read about twin souls and magic before…..but I thought it was a joke. I never believed it was real."

"Me, either," said Ron. "I thought it was like Babbity Rabbity…..you, know……a fairy tale."

"Well, I've never heard of it at all," said Harry.

The old healer shook his head in disbelief. Were none of the old truths taught at school anymore? He let out a long-suffering sigh.

"Every magic has its twin, just as a soul does. It's not fairy tale; it's fact. It's a lucky wizard or witch who finds their mate for one of them. Those who do have stronger powers; they can combine their strengths to produce almost instantaneous healing, easier childbirths, increased longevity and many other advantages. But for those few blessed individuals who find both their twin soul and magic within one person, that pair is nigh unstoppable. They are the stuff of legends; of stories and fables."

Ron eyed the emerald flashes with trepidation, but Draco gazed at them with wonder.

So beautiful, he thought. He couldn't help but be drawn to the glimmers that were eerily reminiscent of the green of Hogwarts' Slytherin House.

Without any conscious thought of doing so, he reached out from where he stood at the foot of the bed and touched one of the beams of light as it flashed by. As soon as he did, a silvery sheet shot out from it to form a dome of light, enclosing him with Hermione.

The healer instinctively tried to pull Draco away, but the older man was pushed back by the power of the magic.

Both Ron and Harry jumped in surprise.

"What do we do?" Ron gasped. He wasn't particularly close Draco, but he didn't want another of their squad injured.

Harry, however, was not afraid; he knew Draco was in no danger. He had seen this kind of magic before. It reminded him of the dome of light that had been made by his and Voldemort's wands.

Which was formed when twin magicks collided.

The three outside the sphere watched as Draco moved to sit on the side of Hermione's bed. He
picked up one of her hands and held it with both of his. They heard him when he uttered, "Take what you need."

Hermione's eyes fluttered opened at the sound of his voice. She stared at him as if unsure whether she was dreaming or not. "Dra...co?"

He nodded, holding the palm of her hand against his cheek. "Whatever you need, love…..take it," he reiterated.

The trio outside the bubble watched in fascination as bright streams of light began to bleed from Draco to Hermione. They watched, mesmerized, as her emerald strands greedily absorbed his golden ones.

"Blimey," breathed Ron. "It's like they had each other's house color inside them."

"That would follow pattern, then. I've read that mirroring is a twin effect," the doctor said while still observing the couple. "Identical twins are exact reflections of one another."

"What do you mean, identical?" asked Harry. He couldn't take his eyes off Draco and Hermione. Both were now glowing. Literally.

"A perfect match," said the healer in answer to Harry's question. "Magic and soul." His voice sounded reverent. "The perfect point and counterpoint."

Ron looked gobsmacked at first, but then the Weasley sense of humor came out. "Those two would end up being twins, hey Harry? The snot and the swot."

Harry chuckled. "How 'bout the pain and the mane?"

Ron grinned victoriously. "Not even close."

The healer paid no mind to the two of them. He continued to watch the pair before him. Draco had taken Hermione in his arms, helping her sit up. He continued to hold her as he whispered something in her ear. The healer saw Hermione's eyes sparkle with unshed tears. She threw her arms around the blonde and whispered something back. A dazzling smile now replacing the worry, Draco lowered his head to give her a kiss that went from tender to sizzling in the blink of an eye.

A perfectly matched pair, twin souls and magicks, had been discovered that day.

The old healer wondered how many stories would be birthed from their union.

---

**AN:** The first bit of the story was taken from real life. That was exactly how I felt during my husband's surgery while I was in the waiting room. It was horrible.

When I was finally able to go up to ICU, he was in a holding room where specialized nurses were in the room with him, watching him around the clock. They talked to my husband, trying to rouse him, but he didn't respond. Finally, I said something to him. It was then when his eyes opened for the first time. He had heard me.

The ending was my little joke about how many stories the Dramione ship has birthed.

And for those who aren't familiar with it, SOS is the International Morse Code distress signal. It is
associated with the phrases, Save Our Souls or Save Our Ship.
Chapter 13

Seven Days In France

Hermione sighed in grateful relief when she'd shaken the last hand after the meeting. This week had been a busy one at the summit she'd attended in France. Draco Malfoy had also been there; the two of them assigned by Kingsley to represent the ministry. She glanced at the blonde now as he gave a nod to the French under secretary to the minister. Once he'd left, they were alone in the conference room.

"Well, that's that," he said. "We could not have hoped for a better outcome."

Hermione smiled at Draco. He'd changed so much since the war. He'd pulled himself out of the rubble of his upbringing; he'd made amends to those he'd wronged. He'd become a friend; nay, more than that, really. Not that he knew that, though.

Just then, an owl appeared outside the window. Draco went over to retrieve the message tied to its leg. Opening it, he began to read; then he grinned.

"It's from Kingsley," he said in answer to Hermione's look. "Word travels fast; he's already congratulating us on our work here."

Hermione chuckled as she dropped down into a nearby chair. Slipping off her heels, she rubbed one of her aching feet. "He should; we worked our butts off."

"Still have mine, thank you very much," he quipped.

And so do you, he thought, admiringly. Thank Merlin.

Hermione Granger was no longer the frizzy haired, overworked third of the golden trio. That honor had been relinquished about a year after the war. Maybe it was the absence of doom hanging over their heads that finally caused her eyes to be opened, but when it dawned on Hermione that Harry and Ron expected her to continue her role as personal assistant to them, she told them they could stuff it.

Their constant demands for help and attention no longer dominating her day, Hermione found she had the time and energy to devote to other interests. One of the very first things she did was to care for someone who sorely needed it. On the suggestion of Draco himself, she treated herself to a vacation. Molly Weasley tried to warn her of the improprieties of a young witch traveling abroad alone, but Hermione turned a deaf ear. She arranged for a portkey that would take her to Rome.

While she was there, she got her wild mane cut into a short pixie style that brought out the loveliness of her heart-shaped face. Feeling deliciously light and free, she set out to do what she wanted for a change. Hermione toured the city, ate the best of local fare and woke up each morning to an espresso and a returning zest for life. After Rome, she'd apparated to Switzerland to finish out the remainder of her vacation on a walking tour of the country. Being out in God's beautiful creation soothed her spirit. Part of her former melancholy had been the war. She knew that. But now she was seeing how much of a drain it had been on her to be in two unhealthy relationships. She was determined not to make that same mistake again. The rest of her life was before her. She was going to live it.

Three weeks after she'd left London, she came back with a glowing tan and a new lease on life.
One of the first things she did was to take Draco out to dinner as a thank you for encouraging her to get away.

"You didn't have to do this, Granger," he said between bites of steak. "You're allowed to be selfish every once in a while."

"I would have never worked up the courage on my own," she confessed. "I would still be where I always was. Ron and Harry's grunt. Overlooked. Unappreciated. Exhausted."

"Tossers," he sneered. "I know I can't talk, seeing as how I bullied you before, but everyone in Slytherin wondered why you put up with them for as long as you did. Even my mother, who was no fan of muggles back then, thought it abhorrent the way they took advantage of you." He put down his fork and leaned closer to her; his grey eyes captured her brown ones. "Say what you will about my father. I know what he was. But he treated the women in his life with respect. Even with my insane aunt (Hermione couldn't help but shudder at the mention of Bellatrix), he showed more regard for her feelings and welfare than the dimwitted duo ever did for you."

Thinking back to that evening, Draco knew he hadn't fancied Granger when he'd encouraged her to think of herself. True, when she'd come home with that atrocious owl's nest lopped off, he'd done a double-take; Hermione Granger was......pretty?

Beautiful is more like it, Draco now thought as he eyed the witch in front of him.

Learning how to work with a former enemy hadn't been easy. Every day had cringe-inducing moments where he was forced to recall a slur, a mean-spirited remark. Her torture. His bigotry.

But they got through it.

Now he couldn't think of anyone he'd rather be around. Hermione in her fetching muggle dresses, always with a smile and sometimes, a wink for him. Stimulating conversation. Good-natured bantering. On weekdays they ate lunch together and their Thursday night dinner for two was an unspoken reservation they both kept. For a solid year they'd done this.

Now Draco wanted more. He wanted it all, actually.

He stared at Hermione, wondering if she'd ever give him a chance for a forever kind of relationship. She'd been hurt by Ron and Harry, but surely she was healed now.

Draco finally made up his mind.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained, he reminded himself.

Giving her the parchment from Kingsley, he said, "The minister is giving us a paid week off as a bonus for the work we did here." Watching her eyes sparkle in delight at that bit of news, he asked, "Want to spend it here?"

"Sorry?" Hermione thought she hadn't heard right.

Draco walked over to where she was sitting. Crouching down in front of her, he took one of her hands.

"It would be a dream vacation for me. But only if I could share it with you. Please say yes." For the first time, Draco knowingly allowed his heart to show in his eyes.

Hermione sucked in a breath; was she dreaming? She stared at his expressive face, his eyes so
eloquently saying what his tongue found hard to form.

*He feels the same way I do.*

She reached out with her free hand and timidly brushed back the strands of hair that had fallen over his forehead. They were as silky as she'd always imagined.

"Yes," she whispered.

She watched as a shy kind of smile she'd never seen before on Draco grace his features. His eyes softened.

Unknown to Hermione, her face was showing the same wonder….the same humility.

They both knew where this was headed.

When asked years later, they always referred to their vacation in France as the turning point in their lives. Not when they got their Hogwarts letter, not when the war ended, but the seven days alone on the continent. Seven days to cement the love that had been slowly building for a year. During those seven days, Draco and Hermione strolled hand-in-hand down the avenue des Champs-Élysées in Paris, enjoyed many of the outdoor cafes, toured a vineyard at Bordeaux and sampled the various wines there, and while they were near it, went to Le Verdon-sur-Mer to enjoy the sea.

As each day passed, Hermione's heart fell more deeply into Draco's grasp. Her heart thrilled when he stopped and hand fed her grapes at the vineyard; when they'd gone boating, he'd held her in his arms while she'd leaned back against his chest, her eyes closed, feeling the sun and sea breeze work their magic on the two of them.

Draco was no different. Every time a handsome young man eyed up Hermione, saying something in French that made Draco's ears turn red, it took all he had not to hex them. Each morning as they ate their standard breakfast of coffee and croissants, he wished their time together would never end.

The day before they were to portkey back to England, Draco told Hermione he was going out for a bit and suggested she get a massage while he was gone.

When he got back a couple of hours later, he found Hermione still in her lounge pants.

"Change your mind about the massage?"

She frowned, her bottom lip poking out in a bit of a pout. Draco thought it was the cutest thing he'd ever seen. "No, they weren't open. I was by myself the entire time…..and I didn't like it!"

Draco wanted to laugh but then realized he'd never get a better intro than that. Pulling Hermione into his arms, he whispered into her hair, "What if I said I could make it so you would never be alone again. Would you let me?"

Hermione gasped. "Wha….."

Draco knelt down in front of her. With his long fingers, he fished out a small velvet box from his pocket. That was where he'd been that morning; at the local jewelers to purchase what he wanted to forever after see on Hermione's left ring finger.

He swallowed nervously. "Or what if you had the power to keep me from ever being alone again?
Would you do that for me?" His voice, so vulnerable and unsure, broke.

And so did Hermione.

Throwing herself into his arms, she whispered, "Yes".
Chapter 14

Wedding, Part I: The Blessing

It would be the wedding of the century. And quite possibly, the one to end all wars. At least, those caused by pureblood supremacy ideology.

Hermione Granger, the female third of the Golden Trio would today be bonded in magical matrimony to none other Draco Malfoy, scion of the Malfoy dynasty and former death eater. Their wedding would be held at the ancient seat of the Malfoy family in Wiltshire, but in a move that would cause the wizarding press to go into a tailspin, all wards were being temporarily removed to allow muggle guests to attend the wedding.

Another item of interest that would surely be reported would be those who were to stand with the bride and groom…..

_It has been revealed to the Daily Prophet that the Chosen One, Harry Potter himself, will be one of those attending in the highly anticipated Malfoy-Granger nuptials. Accompanying him will be Ronald Weasley, War Hero and Order of Merlin First Class recipient, Neville Longbottom, Order of Merlin First Class recipient and Blaise Zabini, Witch Weekly's Winsome Wizard of the year. His Grace Theodore Nott, of the ancient and noble House of Nott, will be fulfilling the role of best man for Mr. Malfoy._

_Ginny Weasley Potter, Holyhead Harpies seeker, will be attending the bride as matron of honor. Joining her will be Fleur Weasley, co-owner of Shells & Spells Gift Boutique, Luna Lovegood, roaming correspondent of The Quibbler, Pansy Parkinson, newly appointed Muggle Studies Professor at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, and Hannah Abbott, assistant manager of the Leaky Cauldron._

"Isn't it odd that they described the men by honors or titles and the women by the work we do?" observed Luna as she read the society column.

"Pfft. Whatever," dismissed Pansy with a wave of the hand. "Those reporters don't think I actually work. They think I show up in class everyday just in time to flirt with the seventh year wizards. They can't imagine I enjoy teaching."

"If they would visit Hogwarts, they would soon see that, Pansy. You are a credit to the school. And you are proof that people can grow and change. Why, you know more about muggle technology than I do." Hermione smiled kindly at the witch. She and Pansy had grown very close. No one was as surprised as they. The two unlikely friends had found a kindredness in each other and loved the other fiercely.

A soft smile replaced the frown on Pansy's face. Rising up from her chair, she said, "Let me help you with that, love. You don't want it falling off during the ceremony." She secured Hermione's veil and tiara with an additional comb.

"I told Draco this thing was too heavy. It keeps slipping to the side. Bloody crown's going to give me a headache," she groused, but tenderly touched Pansy's hand as a thank you for her help.
"I'll put a feather light charm on it. That will help. Can't have you complaining of a headache on your wedding night," Pansy winked.

The other girls laughed when Hermione's cheeks began to glow crimson.

"Draco thinks you're a princess, Hermione. That's why he wants you to have the family jewels," Luna remarked, not realizing how that would sound to everyone else.

For a moment, no one said anything. Then, they all burst out laughing.

Luna frowned, puzzled. Then her face cleared. "Ah…..you were thinking…"

"...that it was time to have our pictures taken before the ceremony," Pansy cut in, trying to spare her bashful friend further embarrassment. She knew Hermione had wanted to wait for marriage to be intimate. It was one of the things that, oddly enough, had drawn Draco to her. He'd been raised in the old ways. He was honored she'd saved herself for him, for he had done the same. Pureblood traditions dictated no less. The coming together of two virgins made a magical union all the more potent.

"Come, ladies.....let's leave the bride with her matron of honor. The customs must be observed." Pansy said as she herded the other witches out of the room.

"But.....shouldn't it be the mother of the....." began Hannah just before Pansy shut the door.

"Now it's just us," said Ginny.

Hermione looked at her friend through the mirror. She'd acted strangely all afternoon. More thoughtful. Sentimental, even.

"What's going on, Gin?"

"I want to give you a blessing, 'Mione. Is that alright?" she asked with unusual gentleness.

Hermione was quick on the uptake. She'd read about the gifts bestowed on brides before a wedding took place. She gasped. *Surely she doesn't mean ....*

But Ginny did.

The custom Pansy had been referring to was a ritual that went back for centuries. It was customary for the mother of the bride to present her daughter with the blade that would bond the couple. Normally, a family knife was used; one imbued with power, protection and charms unique to that house. Before the dagger would be given, the mother would call forth a vision to see what runes should be added to it, for these would also serve as the couple's marriage marks.

Ginny had witnessed Hermione's struggle in the wizarding world. She'd seen the unfairness of it all. Her friend had put her life on the line to save a world that had not wanted her. That fact made Ginny see red. She decided to do something about it. She would take upon herself the time-honored duty of a magical matriarch. She would have this gift crafted as a testimony of her love and devotion to the witch who quite literally was the reason her brother and husband made it out of the war alive.

But it would come at a cost. Magic had a price.

Ginny didn't care.
First, she'd gone to her husband. Harry had tears in his eyes when she'd finished telling him what she'd had planned. He offered to do it for her, but she refused. Harry had given enough for others. This was her duty and pain. Next, she consulted her mother. As expected, Molly was in favor of the idea. She gave her daughter the name of a seer she could trust. Ginny had gone, not knowing what to expect. But when she gazed into the Eye that belonged to the prophetess, a series of images appeared to her. She knew they were the runes for Hermione and Draco, because the symbols spoke of forgiveness, of acceptance, of new beginnings….of redemption. House Malfoy would rise again, this time forging a legacy far greater and lasting than the one before it.

Ginny had already selected a knife. She'd found a kirpan that was perfect and fit her intent. She herself carved the runes she'd seen in the Crystal. Within the recesses of the grooves, she added the powers of her family. For that, magick demanded payment. It had been necessary to spill blood; her blood. She had done it willingly; joyously, thereby further adding to the spell's enchantments. The long, ugly scar she would forever wear afterward bore proof of her commitment.

Seeing the blade Ginny now held in her hand, Hermione beheld for the first time the disfigured arm. The time had come for love to be revealed. She knew what Ginny was about to do.

"Oh," she whispered, tears clouding her vision.

The redhead gently wiped them away. "You aren't allowed to ruin this fabulous makeup job of mine."

Hermione gave her a watery chuckle. "Yes, Sister."

Ginny's face softened at that declaration. Once she was done, it would be fact. Magic would make it so. Hermione would be a member of House Weasley and Potter. And soon afterward, Malfoy. She would be the bridge uniting the three great houses. No one could ever say again she had no place in their world.

Ginny placed the kirpan in Hermione's hand. "You know what this is for, don't you?"

Hermione nodded.

"Right. Now I know you're better at incantations than me, but this time, I get to be the caster." Then she spoke solemnly, the magic of her affirmations hanging heavy in the air. "The blessing of our House be upon you. The strength of our House I give you."

Ginny began to inscribe her family's runes on Hermione's shoulders with the tip of her forefinger. Hermione sucked in a breath; she felt a warmth travel down through skin and tissue where it finally rested, deep inside her bones. She closed her eyes as the velvety flow of Ginny's magic settled on her. The soft cadence of the Latin phrases was calming to the nervous bride. In the spell Ginny was chanting, the bright fires of the Burrow, the laughter of the twins, Ron's faithfulness, Molly's kindness, Arthur's childlike wonder, the adventure of Charlie, the intelligence of Bill….even the drive of Percy coalesced to gift Hermione with the greatest asset of that house…..a happy and loving home. From House Potter, Hermione felt the thrill of inclusion, of hospitality and camaraderie. Harry's love swirled around her in utter joy. Ginny added the final touch of her own indomitableness and Harry's bravery to make it complete.

Hermione was completely overwhelmed. Until then, she'd never truly fathomed the might of an ancient house. The Weasleys were so easy-going and affable, it was easy to forget that they were one of the twenty-eight. But now she felt the sheer power that coursed within her. It was formidable. She looked at Ginny. The younger witch looked back at her. Affectionately. Lovingly. But now that the blessing had been delivered, also with a hint of undisguised mischief on her face.
Hermione didn't understand why that was until her friend said, "Just so you'll be prepared…..you probably received the Weasley fertility, too."

"!" thought the bride.

Ginny laughed. Our little surprise gift for Draco, she thought devilishly.
Chapter 15

Wedding, Part II : The Men

While Ginny and Hermione were having their special moment, in another wing of the manor a different conversation was being held.

"Would you hurry up? You're going to make us late!"

Blaise flinched, the pain in his head throbbing at Draco's volume. The celebrations from the night before were exacting their misery. Taking a sip of coffee, he muttered, "Must you yell? I'm right here, you know."

"Give the bridegroom a break. Draco's decibel always goes up whenever he's nervous," Theo said. Giving his fingernails a quick check, he added in a bored tone, "Perhaps he's getting cold feet."

He privately wished it so. Draco had been his friend since childhood. He hated that he was about to marry someone so…so... modern. And with such decided opinions. The heir of the ancient house of Malfoy deserved someone more in keeping with their rank and sympathetic to their lifestyle.

Will she even allow Draco to have house elves anymore? Ugh.....I suppose we'll now be subjected to dinners where the conversation will be centered on creature rights....or that blasted muggle technology. Theo's face darkened in anger at the thought. He believed he had cause to hate the growing influence Hermione held over his friends. Particularly in regard to one witch.

"You're barmy," Draco responded, pulling Theo out of his thoughts. "I'm the luckiest bloke that ever lived, and don't think I don't know it. I managed to snag the pride of Gryffindor. If anyone should be getting cold feet, it should be Hermione."

Ron and Harry smiled warmly at Draco's words, but Theo sighed loudly.

Poor sod….you really are bewitched.

"Malfoy….would you hold still? I can't fasten your cufflinks if you keep bouncing around," Harry complained. Draco had been so fidgety, he'd been unable to handle his buttons until Harry took pity on him and intervened. They both still called each other by their surnames, but at least now it was from habit instead of malice. In fact, Draco's relationship to Harry was quite strong. Hermione teased them about it and said they had a bromance. She wasn't too far off.

"What do you think the ladies are doing?" asked Blaise as he added another vial of headache potion to his cup.

"Probably got a cracking game of poker going, if Ginny has anything to say about it," teased Neville. "She loves that game. Beat me out of twenty galleons the last time we played."

"It's scary how good she is," agreed Ron. "She must be cheating."

"Maybe that's why she visited that seer a few weeks ago. She might be divining what cards you're holding." Neville grinned at Ron's expression. He'd been merely joking, but Ron obviously thought his comment had merit.
"Blimey, Harry. My own little sister's a sharpie!"

Blaise frowned, puzzled. "Sharpie?"


"Oh? You know something I don't?" asked Draco.

"Yeah. I do." That led to Harry telling the men about the blessing Ginny was bestowing on Hermione.

"Blimey…..that's powerful magic," Neville said after Harry was through. He was clearly impressed.

"My wife is one very powerful witch," agreed Harry. "So is yours," he nodded to Draco.

Draco stood silently, deeply moved by Ginny's gesture. He understood the ramifications of her actions. So did Theo. But unlike Draco, he didn't appreciate the gift. There would be no way now to nullify Hermione's clout among their friends and society in general. The connection to two Houses of the Twenty-eight and to one of the most famous names in the wizarding world meant not even his wealth and position could overshadow her. Blast that interfering ginger! Theo gritted his teeth in frustration. He felt in desperate need of a smoke.

"But I don't understand," Ron was saying. "How did the magic work? Hermione's not related to us."

Harry said, "She is now," at the same time Blaise answered, "The way these things usually work, I imagine. Blood oblation. Am I right, Potter?"

Harry nodded. "Yeah. You should see Ginny's arm. It's not too far off from how 'Mione's looks."

Everyone wizard listening winced. They'd all seen Hermione's permanent souvenir from the war.

"Gin …" Ron whispered.

"Well, this is all very touching," drawled Theo, "but shouldn't we be focusing on the bridegroom? Or do you intend to try to make this day all about the altruism of the Weasleys?"

"What is that supposed to mean?" asked Ron. His face began to turn red, never a good sign.

"Oh, sorry there. I wasn't supposed to use big words, was I?"

"Shut it, Nott. This is not the time or place," Harry said, his voice taking on a steely edge.

"Yeah….why don't you just…." Ron started to say before Draco, trying to stop a fight, interrupted him.

"Theo….can you join me outside?"

Nott frowned but dutifully followed Draco out of his chambers.

"Bloody stuck-up prig," muttered Ron after they left. "I don't know how Draco can stand him."

"Draco was him just a few short years ago. Or don't you remember?" asked Blaise while casually changing into his tuxedo.
Ron's scowl turned to a smirk. He chuckled. "Yeah, I remember. How could I forget?"

Harry eyed the Italian curiously. "Why were you never that way, Zabini?"

"Because my last name isn't as illustrious. It didn't come with ranking attached to it."

Ron cocked his head. "What do you mean? The Zabini line is a fine, respected wizarding house."

"So is the house of Weasley. But neither of us are considered to be part of the upper crust, the aristocracy." Blaise began to button his shirt. "Tell me, Weasley.....do you have a title? And I don't mean that crap 'Weasley is our King' Draco made up years ago. I mean a real title. Do you?"

Ron looked down, embarrassed. "No."

"Don't feel badly; neither do I. But Draco and Theo do. And so will Hermione after she marries Draco."

Harry and Ron were surprised.

"Malfoy has never discussed it that I can recall," said Harry.

"Well....muggle nobility is not often the topic of conversation in a magical community. Still......it commands respect. And power. Draco is an Earl while Theo's even higher. He's a Duke."

"Duke?" asked Harry. "Of what?"

Blaise grinned. "Can't you guess?"

Harry looked at Ron and Neville. "Do you know?"

Ron shook his head while Neville smirked. He finally knew something Harry didn't. "Yeah. I know. But I'm not saying."

Harry turned back around to Blaise. "Are you going to tell me?"

"Think Potter. It has something to do with his name."

His name? Nott? Harry couldn't think of anything he would associate with it.

"Give up?" asked Blaise.

Harry nodded.

"Nottingham, of course."

Harry's brow rose. "Seriously?"

Blaise nodded. "I swear."

Ron snickered. "That figures. I bet the Sheriff of Nottingham was his ancestor."

"On the contrary. His ancestor was the legendary Robin Hood."

"Bollocks." Harry found that hard to believe.

"It's true. Why do you think Robin Hood is depicted as always wearing green? He was a Slytherin. A good one, I might add. He fought against two of the darkest wizards of that time, Sir Guy and
the Sheriff. They were stealing from muggles. Terrorizing villages. Sound familiar?" Blaise swallowed his last bit of coffee and stood up. "Muggle legends never had it right. But whatever. Theo's lineage used to be an honorable one until his grandfather and father threw in their lot with Voldemort. I'm sorry he's acting like an arse now."

Well. That was something that was going to have to sink in to the male members of the Golden trio. Nott had Robin Hood as an ancestor.

*Ha! Bet Goyle's descended from Friar Tuck,* thought Harry amusedly.

It was Neville who returned the subject back to what Blaise had mentioned before.

"So….once she's married…..Hermione will be a…"

"Countess," said Blaise. "But she will be called Lady. Lady Hermione Malfoy."

For a moment, no one said anything. Then Harry said, "It suits her. She is a lady."

"Aye. That she is," agreed Ron.

"Theo…..you're going to have to accept this."

Nott took a drag of his cigarette. "Why?"

"Because I love her. She's my life now."

Theo blew out a puff of smoke. "You see, that's what I'm not understanding. How in the name of Merlin did that happen? You despised her in school."

"Well….perhaps I did when we were younger. But my feelings changed."

"So you've said. Still bloody hard to believe. The both of you fought like cats and dogs." A wicked grin spread across his face. "Or don't you recall that sucker punch in third year? I distinctly remember the sound of your nose crunching on impact."

Draco chuckled. "I deserved it."

"No doubt. But do you want to be shackled the rest of your life to a hellcat?"

Theo watched as Draco's smirk turned into a soft smile. "I can't wait."

"Gah….you're hopeless." Theo took another long drag and purposely blew it into Draco's face. "I know a whipped pup when I see one."

Draco waved away the nicotine cloud. "But a very happy one. Before Hermione, I was desperate. And lonely. You can't understand what that felt like. You always had Pansy."

"Had is right," mumbled Theo.

Draco gave his friend a calculating look. "Is that what this is really all about? Pansy?"

Theo angrily snuffed out the remaining stub of his cigarette. "She was fine with our situation until she took up with your witch. Now she'll hardly give me the time of day."
"Pansy grew up, Theo."

"Yes, thank you. I'm quite aware of that. Unfortunately, it was away from me."

"Only because you stood still."

Theo paused. The look in his eyes changed from anger to resignation. "Regrettably, being still is what happens when one can't move. My chains are heavy, Draco."

"You're not chained. Not any longer. We're finally free."

Theo shook his head at Draco's optimism. Granger had obviously influenced him. "Not all of us have bright futures to look forward to. You know what I'm tied with….what my name carries."

'I know your father is in Azkaban for the rest of his life, just like mine. That means you can make your name what you want it to be. House Nott can be great again. Your ancestors would attest to that."

"But all of our connections….our interests….."

"...can change with you." Draco put his hand on Theo's shoulder. "What do you think I've been doing? This a new world. I, for one, want to live in it."

Theo gave Draco a wistful look. "I can hardly believe I'm saying it, but you actually manage to make me feel…..jealous?"

Draco laughed. "Good. Then join us. I'll help you...you know I will. Pansy would too, if you would let her."

"I doubt it. She doesn't want me. She's made that abundantly clear."

Draco rolled his eyes. Theo was worse than Ron when it came to understanding women. "Does she know you want her?"

"What?"

"Have you tried being honest with Pans?"

Theo looked at Draco like he was crazy. "Are you mad?"

"Are you? She's probably just waiting for you to declare your intentions. For some strange reason, witches like that."

Theo released a long-suffering whine. "Is that really necessary? I've called her Duchess since fifth year. Wasn't that hint enough?"

Draco snorted. "That's like asking if a handshake is enough to make a baby."

A sudden gleam filled Theo's eye. "I've always wanted that, you know. To see Pansy filled with my babes. To watch her grow round with them. Dark-haired little tots with rogue eyes and dimpled cheeks. I can see them, Draco. I can see my children. Mine and Pansy's."

Draco understood. He'd been through the exact same thing. "So go after your vision, Mate. Woo Pansy. Don't assume she knows how you feel….tell her. Often." He paused. "You do love her…..right? It's not just because she would make an acceptable match?"
Theo became deadly serious. "Of course, I do. It's always been her. I'll never want anyone else."

"Tell her that."

"Is that what you did with Granger?"

"You need to get used to saying Hermione. And yes, I did. Just between the two of us, I don't mind telling you…..I was petrified. Scared she'd laugh at me…..or break my nose again. But see how it ended? It was the best decision of my life."

Theo tsked. His moment of transparency over, he once again affected nonchalance. "But how beastly inconvenient. All those emotions….and declarations….." He pretended to shudder. "It's so…..touchy-feely."

Draco laughed. "But effective. Try it. It worked for me."

Theo sighed. He supposed there was nothing for it, then. He couldn't argue with success.

---

AN: The bit about Robin Hood was just for fun. I don't think there is a Duke of Nottingham; I think it's an Earl instead. But I wanted Theo to be higher than Draco. I admittedly know very little about the peerage system of the UK.

And I read online that Brits use the term *card sharp* while Americans use *card shark*. 
Chapter 16

Wedding Part III: The Ceremony

Jean Granger gave a sentimental sigh. She stood by the window, watching her husband as he made his way back to the manor. It was time to fetch their daughter. The mother of the bride turned to the handsome man patiently waiting at her side.

"Sorry, Harry."

"Nothing to be sorry about, Jean."

She smiled bravely, but he knew her well enough to know the truth. Jean was no different than other mothers of weddings past…….she was having a hard time letting her daughter go.

Taking Harry's arm, she allowed him to escort her to her seat. The church was an old and beautiful one, seated within the property belonging to the Malfoys and only a stone's throw from the south gardens of Malfoy Manor, where the reception was to be held. Inside the sanctuary, pale hydrangeas mixed with blush cabbage roses to create an ambiance that was all Hermione. Jean touched the pocket sewn into her dress; yes, she'd remembered to put her handkerchief back. She'd already used it once. Ginny Potter had come for her to give Hermione a final kiss before the wedding. All it had taken was one look at her daughter in her bridal loveliness for Jean to start crying. Silly, really, since she was normally not a crier; neither was her daughter, but both of them had become quite dewy in each other's arms.

"Mum," Hermione had whispered, trembling like a leaf.

"There, there," Jean comforted while rubbing her back in a soothing way. "What's wrong, love?"

"Well……." she sniffed. "I……"

A thought hit Jean. "You haven't changed your mind, have you?"

Hermione pulled back and gave her mother a incredulous look. "Of course not!"

"Oh……." She was taken aback at Hermione's sudden vehemence. "You just seemed……."

"Mental?" Hermione sighed, her fire disappearing as quickly as it had appeared. "Perhaps I am right now."

"Care to share what's got your wand in a knot?"

In spite of her nerves, Hermione couldn't help but smirk. She thought it comical whenever her parents used wizarding expressions. "It's silly, but…..Mum……..I'm scared."

"Of what, dear?"

"Of…..of……I don't know!" she admitted, confused and overwhelmed by her wildly varying emotions.

Jean laughed. She couldn't help it. Hermione was a wonderful daughter, but she did have a tendency to become a bit of a drama queen before big events. She now knew what the trouble was and why Hermione's moods were changing like the wind. Her daughter had always been high-
strung. A perfectionist. She liked plans. She liked control. Being in charge kept fears at bay. But right now, with all the preparations done, she had nothing to do but wait. And waiting was the hardest thing for her daughter. It was, in its purest form, a state of relinquishing control; of being part of a process instead of being outside it, pulling the strings. She knew Hermione needed a distraction. She needed to get her mind off herself.

"Hon, I'm worried. You know your father….."

"Uh-oh. What's he done now?"

Jean grinned. "Other than try Narcissa's patience, nothing yet. But give him a little time."

Hermione snorted, knowing her mother was right. After breakfast, she'd looked out the window to see her father walking in the gardens with Draco's mother. She knew Narcissa's expressions by now. The look she'd been wearing had been one of patient endurance. Hermione could guess what was happening. Her father was probably quizzing her about every magical plant in her garden. Richard Granger was Arthur Weasley in reverse. Everything about magic fascinated him.

"He can't wait to meet all the magical folk coming to the wedding. I….I hope they'll take him well. He's not in danger of being hexed, is he?"

"No, Mum," Hermione chuckled. "They'll know to behave themselves."

"Well, that's a relief. He's such an extrovert, you know. He might forget why we're here."

"I hardly doubt he'll forget I'm getting married."

"He might. I do love that man, but sometimes he's dreadfully absent-minded. I'm afraid that once you two start down the aisle, he'll get so caught up in his winks and nods to the guests, he might walk you straight through and out the back door of the church."

Hermione shook her head in amusement. She loved her father dearly, but she knew her mother wasn't too far off in her assessment of him.

"You've got to keep him focused. When it's time for him to hand you off to Draco, don't let him lift your veil; Draco's supposed to do that."

"I know that, Mum."

"I know you do, dear. It's your father who will forget. I'm placing you in charge of him, Hermione."

Walking beside Harry, Jean snickered at the memory of their conversation, causing him to look at her curiously.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked.

"Just remembering my daughter's mini-meltdown before I came to the church."

Harry grinned. "I was wondering when that would happen. Was it as bad as the night before her Newts?"

"Oh, no….nothing that dramatic. She wants this too badly."

Harry smiled warmly. He knew that was true. He was happy Hermione had found true love. Draco was perfect for her, and she, him. Although it still seemed incredible that their childhood enemy
Jean continued to cling to Harry’s arm. He’d always had a comforting effect on her. She loved him as she would a son of her own and had wondered at one point if he and Hermione might make a match of it. But that was before she’d met Draco. As much as she loved Harry, she now knew that he and her daughter would not have suited one another. Hermione and Draco did. Both were meticulous, both articulate, both stubborn. Both loyal to a fault. Both in need of someone who would understand them.

After Harry had seated her, Jean slyly looked around at the mixture of muggle and magical guests in attendance. She smothered a grin. It was amusing to see how wizards interpreted muggle fashion. One man, obviously magical, was sitting nearby.

*He must be relative of the Malfoys*, she thought.

His hair was white blonde and tied back in a sleek ponytail. He had on a suit of the most awful and garish shade of yellow Jean had ever seen.

*Good Lord. That man can't be married. No woman, witch or muggle, would let her husband leave their home looking like that.*

A little bit behind him was Professor McGonagall. Although Jean loved the professor dearly, the woman had never mastered the basics of muggle apparel. Right now, she had on a green fascinator, a purple silk blouse and a grey and red pleated tartan skirt. Jean shuddered.

*Heavens above, Minerva, where are your eyes?* Jean shrugged. *Although I suppose it's better than canary yellow.*

On the other side of the aisle, another woman sat. Close to Jean's age, she was trying (and failing) to look twenty years younger. This woman, obviously a witch, had peroxide blonde curls and was wearing jewelled glasses while twirling a green-plumed pen in her hand.

*What is it with these magical people and their obsession with blonde hair? Thank goodness, Draco's is natural.*

The sudden change in music told Jean it was time to stop her internal critiquing. Hermione's attendants would soon begin their procession down the aisle. She already knew she would find no faults in their stylish gowns. First, from a side door came Draco and his best man, the Duke of Nottingham. Draco looked excited, his normally pale face flushed. His Grace, the Duke, appeared bored and nervous, if such a thing were possible.

Jean looked out of the corner of her eye to chance a glance at Draco’s mother. Narcissa sat straight and prim. And alone. When he and Hermione had first started dating, Draco told Jean of his father's imprisonment. She wondered if his absence at the wedding would affect Draco. She didn't have to wonder that about Narcissa; Jean could see the tell-tale signs of tears around her blue eyes.

*Poor dear. I'm glad she's coming over for dinner tomorrow night. That will help a little. I know she's going to miss Draco living with her.*

Her attention was diverted away from Narcissa when she saw the first attendant, Pansy Parkinson, approaching the altar. Jean noticed the way the best man’s eyes followed her as she made her way up to the front.

*Well, well, well. What have we here...I believe Mr. Nott is quite smitten with her.*
Next came the eccentric Lovegood girl. Jean didn't understand her half the time, but attributed it to the girl being an artistic sort.

*That one was born out of time. Luna would have been right at home in the 1960's.*

In short order, the rest of the wedding party took their places to wait for the appearance of the bride.

Jean swallowed and smoothed non-existing wrinkles from her dress. An unaccustomed feeling of anxiety hit her hard.

*Breathe, Jean. Now is not the time to have a fit of nerves.*

The guests around her rose from their seats. Hermione and her father were beginning their walk down the aisle.

Rising with everyone else, Jean couldn't take her eyes off of either of them. Richard's face betrayed how proud he was of his exceptional daughter, his smile radiating enough wattage to render the lighting in the building unnecessary. Beside him, Hermione looked shy but happy, a demure smile peeking through the silk tulle covering her face.

A movement near the altar caught Jean's eye. It was Draco, turning around to see his bride for the first time. Beside him, Theo stood, grinning at the expression on his friend's face. Jean's breath caught when she saw the wonder so plainly written on Draco's features. It was the face of a man finding out angels were real and seeing one for the first time.

Awe. Speechlessness. Humility.

Theo had to make a quick grab for Draco's tuxedo to keep him from sprinting down the aisle to meet Hermione. Undeterred, he held out his hand to his bride, his eyes imploring her to join him. Jean had a sudden lump in her throat.

*My heart...he loves her so.*

The bride and groom's love for each other was causing the air in the church to pulse. The stained glass windows began to shimmer with the strength of their magic. The saints depicted in them momentarily came to life and began to wave to the couple, quite happy at being allowed to witness the union.

Seeing the figures in the stained-glass move, Jean gasped. She quickly looked around at her friends in attendance. Thankfully, none seemed to notice. They all had their eyes on the couple at the front.

As soon as he'd secured Hermione's hand in his, Draco drew her close. He slowly, carefully lifted her veil.

"Mine," he whispered. Then he kissed her cheek.

The priest gave a short, amused cough. Draco ignored him.

"You are so beautiful," he mouthed privately to Hermione, although all watching could clearly make out what he said.

"I love you," she whispered back.

Done with his part, Richard went back to sit with his wife. "Our doodlebug's all grown up now,
Jean," he murmured in a low voice.

"She is indeed," she whispered back.

"He'll make her happy. He already has."

Jean looked at the couple's faces as they began their vows. Both were glowing.

"Aye."

"And think of all the cute grandbabies we'll have to love and spoil!" he whispered gleefully, then chuckled at the look on Jean's face. Sure, she wanted grandchildren… but not now.

A few heads turned in their direction.

"Shhh, Richard. People will get the wrong idea. They'll think they're already in the family way."

"Tosh. This lot wouldn't care anyway. Do witches even carry their young? They're probably used to popping them out with an abracadabra."

That comment did get quite a few stares, as Richard's voice was not as quiet as he thought.

"Richard!" Jean hissed.

To his credit, the good doctor hushed after that. Jean sighed in relief.

It was now that time in the ceremony for the rituals to begin. The first one was the Circle. Draco began to walk around Hermione, circling her seven times to supposedly bring down any walls between them. Jean knew this was an enactment of the fall of the walls of Jericho when the Israelites marched around it seven times with the Ark of the Covenant. Unknown to their guests, he was also warding his bride with every protection afforded him by his family's ancient line. She was his jewel, his prize. His ark. His safe place. The holder of all that was and would be precious to him. She was his to protect and defend. When he was done, Hermione returned the favor and wound around him all the charms and spells she knew that would keep him safe.

The next custom was the sharing of cup. They had to be careful with this one, so as not to let too much magic show. The priest offered Hermione and Draco each a crystal flute. While their backs were to the audience, the priest nicked their ring fingers with the kirpan Ginny had given Hermione. As the droplets of blood fell into the flutes, he poured wine to mix with it. The couple swirled their glasses before together pouring the contents into a larger single chalice. Holding up the cup to bless it, the priest first gave it to Draco. He held it to Hermione's lips. She tentatively took a sip of the wine and blood that symbolized the union of their life forces and the combining of their joys. When she was done, she took the cup from Draco and held it up for him. He took a swallow, his eyes never leaving hers as he drank.

The final ritual was the binding. First they dipped each others' hands in a bowl of consecrated water, signifying the cleansing of any and all emotional hurts from the past. Hermione took her time, washing Draco's hands with great care. She wanted him to know that in her eyes, his past was completely washed away. He stood before her clean. Pure. The guests saw the groom tear up, but they had no idea why.

When it was Draco's turn to dip Hermione's hands in the water, he afterward kissed every knuckle on her hands.

"Thank you," he whispered.
Thank you for giving me a chance. Thank you for forgiving me. For loving me.

Hermione could only nod, so moved by his blatant adoration that words failed her. Nearby, Theo watched. But soon his gaze traveled over to the raven-haired bridesmaid standing quietly. Feeling eyes on her, she looked up and saw Theo staring. She blushed but refused to end the connection. Remembering Draco's words, Theo let down his guard and allowed his eyes for once, to be eloquent. To talk for him.

*I want this for us. I love you.*

Pansy's eyes widened in surprise once she interpreted his expression. Her face grew soft and tender. The slight bob of her head gave him his answer. Theo's mouth dropped open in shock. He gave the priest a pointed stare.

*Blast, man...hurry this up! I've got a witch to woo!*

Unaware of the other romance unfolding around them, Harry and Ron were watching Draco.

Ron leaned over to whisper in Harry's ear. "I can't believe I'm saying this…..but Hermione's lucky to have him."

Harry kept his eyes on the couple, but nodded in agreement. The priest was tying their hands together now. Raising his arms in what the muggle guests would think a benediction, but was in fact a spell, he finished the ceremony and pronounced them man and wife.

Draco wasted no time after that. Not waiting for the priest to tell him he could kiss his bride, Draco took Hermione in his arms and demonstrated that he had skills beyond quidditch or potions. Richard chuckled as he watched them.

"Go get 'em, Tiger. To the victor belong the spoils."

Jean sighed knowingly. "There'll be no rest for Hermione tonight."

Richard winked at his wife. "So is it safe to bring up grandchildren again?"
Wedding Part IV: The Reception

The south gardens of the Malfoy estate had never looked so beautiful. Elegant topiaries towered above the guests. So did the wedding cake, having a prominent place in the center of the courtyard, all twelve feet of it. The Malfoy elves, each one having been glamoured to look like human butlers, were busy supplying the wedding guests with champagne and hors d'oeuvres. Near Narcissa's prized roses, a string quartet played.

"They should be here soon, right Harry?" asked Ron as they patiently waited for the bride and groom to make their appearance.

"Yeah….I reckon. How long should posing for pictures take?"

"A lot longer than you think," said Ginny. "Or don't you remember?"

Harry grinned at his wife. "Not really. My mind was elsewhere when it happened to us."

"Ugh….don't start with that again," Ron pretended to shudder. "It was bad enough the first time having to watch you two."

Harry blushed. "Watch what?"

Ron donned a maddening grin. "Oh…..you know."

Ginny choked on her wine. "I assure you, you weren't around when that happened."

Ron waved her protest aside. "Ugh, not that. But I had to watch the previews, didn't I? All that hugging…..kissing…..those goo-goo eyes you made at each other. It was nauseating."

"Says the man who can't find a girlfriend."

"Hey!" he objected. "I have a girlfriend. What do you think Lavender is?"

"An octopus?" grinned Harry. It was time for him to end the snipping between his wife and best friend. "Come on, guys. Let's get another drink and try to remember this day is about Hermione and Draco."

"Don't forget they're family now, Ronald," Ginny added. "No teasing my sister. Or her handsome husband."

The ginger third of the golden trio fumed. "What is this? Pick on Ron day?"

Ginny chuckled as she gave Harry a wink. "Every day is that, brother."

After the ceremony, Rita Skeeter wasted no time pinning down the mother of the groom.

"Narcissa, love!" she gushed in her best imitation of a sincere congratulation, "how happy you must be this day. What a triumph for your family to add to its tree a member of the golden trio."

Narcissa looked over the shoulder of Jean Granger. "I apologize for what you are about to endure," she whispered to the doctor.
Jean grinned. "Is it awful of me that I've looked forward to this?"

Narcissa's eyes twinkled. "No more than I." Turning around, she put on her best society face. "Rita, darling. So thankful you could make it. I wasn't sure you would be back in time."

Rita grimaced. "Yes...I don't know why my editor thought it necessary to send me on assignment to that horrible place."

The horrible place Rita was referring to was a high-security prison created for the worst female offenders. While Azkaban was still the ultimate nightmare for all male evil-doers, The Correctional Institution for Wayward Witches had risen to strike terror in the hearts of all lawbreaking women.

"Well, you know......the war brought about many changes within the ministry. It had become corrupt under Fudge."

"Does that mean they should now go after everyone?"

Narcissa pursed her lips to keep from laughing at the incensed reporter. "Only those who break the law, dear."

Rita humphed. "These registrations are hardly necessary. They infringe on one's free will and expression."

"They also protect the public," Jean spoke up for the first time. "It's no different in the muggle world. The extra securities feel like an inconvenience at first, but soon one gets used to it. If it makes the world a safer place, isn't it worth it?"

Rita glared at Hermione's mother. "You can't understand. Being an animagus is not a crime."

"But being an unregistered one is," said Narcissa softly.

All pretenses gone, Rita sneered, "I suppose you are the expert on the subject of crime. By the way, how's the dear husband? Bless him, I hear Azkaban is so hard on the elder wizards. Particularly those with a certain mark on their arm."

Jean watched as Narcissa's face went pale. The vicious reporter's words had hit their mark. Coming to her aid, the good doctor pulled a small glass jar out of her pocket. "Hermione gave me this," she said. Noting the sudden, terrified look at Rita's face, she added, "Oh, I'm no witch. I can't force you into your beetle form and trap you....."

"But I can," Narcissa finished, her eyes gleaming with controlled anger. "Now, what were you asking me, dear Rita?"

The blonde reporter gulped.

"I hear Dolores Umbridge has yet to find a cellmate who can tolerate her," Narcissa spoke to Jean as if she were discussing the weather. "I wonder how a beetle would fare with a toad? What do you think, Jean?"

"I think it would be a lovely science experiment finding out, don't you think, my dear?" she simpered. Rita now knew where Hermione had gotten her thirst for vengeance.

Jean heard Narcissa mutter a strange-sounding phrase while giving her wrist a little flick. Rita instantly transformed into the smallish alter ego. Narcissa scooped her up and covered her in a cheesecloth before putting her in the jar where she buzzed angrily.
"Maybe prison isn't the place for a reporter, now that I think of it," said Narcissa, pretending to be considering options. Turning to Jean, she said, "Your husband was inquiring about all the magical plants I have in my garden this morning. It's time my Venomous Tentacula was fed; do you think he'd like to watch me while I do that?" She gave Jean a wink.

The beetle buzzed again, this time in obvious fright.

"I think he might," agreed Jean. "He is so fascinated by everything in the magical world."

"Ah, good. Well, tell him we can do that as soon as the reception is over," she said as she patted the pocket of her robes where Rita had been unceremoniously deposited.

That taken care of, she left Jean to speak to the new Minister of Magic.

*What a family,* Jean snickered to herself. *Hermione will feel right at home.*

"Hey you," Draco whispered in Hermione's ear as he held his bride. She snuggled as close as she could while they danced. Peeking over Draco's shoulder, Hermione sighed.

"What is it, love?"

"Still too many people watching," she shrugged. Then she looked at his face and was instantly rewarded with a kiss.

"I don't doubt they're staring at my wife. She IS the most beautiful witch in the world," he said smugly.

Hermione laughed. "Of course I am. Because Malfoys have to have the best, don't they?"

He grinned. "That's right."

Her face softened, her eyes filled with adoration. "I'm a Malfoy too, now."

He didn't understand what she was saying at first, but then her compliment hit him. He tightened his hold on his treasure. "Gods, I don't deserve you."

Hermione kissed him tenderly. "I feel the same way."

Standing by the fountain, Theo watched the bride and groom. He sighed wistfully at their obvious joy and love of the other. Taking one more sip of his champagne, he set the flute down and began to walk toward the area where the bridesmaids were congregating for the traditional tossing of the bridal bouquet. He kept a raven-haired beauty in his sights. While watching her, Theo recalled Draco's words and the heated exchange of looks between him and Pansy during the ceremony.

*Draco said to show her how I feel. I hope he was right about that,* he said to himself. Impulsive Gryffindor displays were not his forte. He tried to keep his mind still from imagining the worst, but some thoughts still slipped by him.

*What if she doesn't return my feelings?*

*What if she laughs at me?*

Theo's hands began to sweat. He absently ran his fingers through his hair. What he would give for a smoke right then, but he knew his time had run out.
"All right, ladies. Here is your chance to catch the bouquet that has been charmed with every love enhancement known to Wizardkind, said Isadora Bracken, the famous magical wedding planner for the event. "Space yourselves out so no one is hurt. Ready?"

She turned to the bride. "You may proceed with the throwing, Mrs. Malfoy."

Beside Hermione, Draco smirked. "Mrs. Malfoy. I love it."

"It would be a little late now if you didn't," Hermione replied merrily. "Here goes!"

Turning her back to the witches, she tossed her bouquet high in the air. Squeals erupted until the airborne flowers totally went against the laws of physics and made a bizarre swerve to the left to land in the hands of a handsome wizard.

Immediately the squeals cut off to be replaced with silence. Theo, flowers in hand, approached a shocked Pansy.

"Pans," he began, "I've wanted this for us since we were nine and you convinced me to try a bite of your banoffee pie."

She chuckled, although her eyes were already beginning to tear up. "You remember that?"

Theo gave her the flowers while cradling her face in his hands. "I remember everything that has you in it."

A collective romantic sigh went through the audience of watchers.

Bleeding sap, thought Ron. He was still a little bit peeved at the titled wizard.

"Please Pansy," Theo begged, his eyes eloquent and pleading, "Please say you want this for us, too. Let ours be the next wedding."

The brunette witch gulped. "Are….are you sure about this Theo? I mean…..it's not like we've been dating…..I…..I thought you'd lost interest."

"Never. There will be only one duchess for me, and you're it. Please say yes."

Pansy's tears finally escaped from her eyes as they made a silver trail down her cheeks. "It's yes, Theo."

"Sweetheart," he murmured as he gathered her into his arms, crushing the bouquet to bits, though neither of them cared at the moment.

"Well, there go your flowers, love," observed Draco, whispering so only she could hear him.

Hermione smiled. "Doesn't matter. My wealthy husband will get me more if I want them."

That earned her a hug from said husband. "Spoiled already. Just like a Malfoy."

"That again? I'm not like a Malfoy; I am a Malfoy. What must I do to convince you?"

Draco gave her a wicked grin. "Ask me again tonight."

Hermione's father was having the time of his life speaking to the numerous wizards and witches at the reception, even though many of them didn't know what to make of the inquisitive muggle.
When Jean and Narcissa finally made it back to him, he was discussing various modes of transportation with Arthur Weasley.

"So….I imagine flying carpets would violate your secrecy rules."

Arthur nodded. "Yes, well….now that you mention that….It's one of the reasons apparition became so popular."

Richard shivered. "Ugh….I did that once with Hermione, you know. Quite a horrible experience. I vomited afterward."

"I did too, the first time I apparated," said Hermione as she and Draco walked up, arm in arm, to where their parents were standing.

"There's my little cabbage!" Dr. Granger exclaimed in delight.

"Oh, Dad….really," Hermione blushed while Draco grinned at her discomfort.

"Allow your bereft father his endearments," he replied, trying to look forlorn, but failing miserably. "My only child is leaving me this day."

"Richard, I understand your feelings completely," added Narcissa, giving her son a pointed look.

Draco rolled his eyes while Hermione asked her mother, "Well? Aren't you going to jump on the 'make them feel guilty' bandwagon?"

"Who, me? Not at all," she said breezily. "I've looked forward to this day."

"Jean! You're not helping," Richard complained.

"Oh yes, I am. The sooner our daughter goes, the sooner we'll have grandchildren. Did you forget that little perk?" she asked with a gleam in her eyes.

"Oh, good Lord," Hermione moaned.

Dr. Granger's face was alit with mischief. "That's right, the thought did slip my mind. Draco, my man, you have your orders. Wave your wand and give me some grandchildren to spoil."

This time, it was Hermione's turn to roll her eyes. "It doesn't quite work that way, Daddy."

"Are you sure? It did when I was your age," he said with a devilish wink.

Narcissa laughed. "I'm sure my son is very adept in fancy wand-work."

"Would everyone quit talking about my husband's body?" Hermione said petulantly. "Although I can see why his wand would be a topic of discussion. It is rather impressive."

Beside her, Draco chuckled.

Richard grimaced. "Your father doesn't want to hear his little girl speak of such things."

Hermione snorted. "You don't want me talking about it, you just want me to do something with it."

"I still don't see why you can't produce children the way I was telling your mother."

"What way is that, Richard?" Narcissa was curious.
"Oh….you know. Just popping them out with an abracadabra," he said as he snapped his fingers, indicating how he thought it should be handled.

Narcissa began to cough, having choked on the sip of champagne she'd just taken. Draco took one look at Hermione and began to laugh, doubling over with mirth.

Hermione just stood there, crimson-faced while her father grinned at the effect he'd had on his daughter's regal husband and mother-in-law, until Harry came up to her and said, "It's time, 'Mione. The portkey is beginning to glow."

All joking stopped as goodbye hugs were given out to their families. But right before they departed, Hermione left their parents with this parting sally.

"Just so you know, I WAS abracadabra'ed with the Weasley's fertility, thanks to Ginny's blessing, so a grandchild may come sooner than you think."

It was hard to say whose shocked expression was the most comical.

But Harry thought it was Draco's.
Summer Holiday

It was Hermione's dream vacation. The one she always talked about. The one she'd described to him when they were just beginning to be friends in a post-Voldemort world. Now that he was her husband, the very least he could do was take her there. But did that mean they had to be so….*muggley* in how they traveled? Draco tried to convince her the magical way was best. It certainly was the fastest.

But, no.

He'd forgotten how tenacious Gryffindors could be. How….*persistent*. It took his wife some time, but she eventually wore him down. Hermione finally convinced (though Draco said it was more like *coerced*) him to board a flight going to Hawaii.

"I don't know why we couldn't have used a portkey," he whined for the thousandth time as she helped him to fasten his seatbelt.

"And miss the scenic beauty of flying over the islands? I think not."

"We could have flown around and seen the sights after we were there. You know….our way, I mean."

Hermione shook her head. "Not there, you can't. Their ministry has a ban on using brooms."

Draco snorted. "Idiots. How are wizards suppose to get around? Apparition doesn't work for every situation."

"Between the islands, the magical community travels the waves. I know we've talked about this already, Darling. For Hawaiians, that method better protects the statute of secrecy. If seen, most claim they're swimming or surfing, which isn't a lie, if you think about it. I mean, enchanting a wave to push you to your intended destination is still riding it, right?"

"Hermione," Draco huffed, "do I look like a surfer?"

Hermione took in Draco's white-blonde hair and chiseled but lean form. "Actually, you do. A pale one, but still…."

Draco grumbled. "Great. Riding a bloody wave. Good Lord, what other tortures have you planned for me?"

Hermione grinned but kept silent.

Draco eyed his wife warily. "Don't answer that."

Once they arrived, Draco was a good sport when he received the traditional Hawaiian welcome of a lei. His brows rose in surprise when the attractive young greeter at their hotel gave him a quick kiss on each cheek after bestowing the flower garland around his neck.

"Pretty man," the comely native murmured.

"Pretty *married* man," Hermione corrected before taking her husband's hand to lead him to their
Draco looked back to see the woman still staring at him. Turning back around, he couldn't pass up the opportunity to tease his wife. Giving her a devilish wink, he said, "Well, now. This might not be so bad after all."

Hermione rolled her eyes at his jesting. "I told you you would like it here."

Draco did like their time in paradise. He loved the fresh seafood; he loved the drinks served in coconuts that had bright paper umbrellas in them, although Hermione said what he liked most was the rum; he liked the breathtaking scenery and warm tropical weather; he even liked strumming the hand-painted guitar Hermione purchased from a souvenir shop. While there, she also got him a pair of the loudest lounge pants Draco had ever seen. She bought them as a joke, but the laugh was on her, because Draco wore them everywhere. Truth was, he loved island life and so did she, in spite of having to endure repeat performances of women lusting over her wizard.

"Am I going to have to glamour you?" she groused one day after watching a group of women stare at her husband's bum all during breakfast. One woman even pointed at it.

"Hmm?" Draco hadn't noticed; he was too busy stuffing himself with fresh pineapple.

"Your allure. You're bewitching the females. Muggle women can't combat it."

Draco looked up then. "My allure? What are you talking about? I'm not a veela."

"No, but the veela strain runs in your family. Trust me, some of the ability to entice and attract trickled down to you."

A lazy grin began to spread across his face. "Really now," he drawled. "Well, what do you know. Hermione Granger thinks I'm alluring."

"Oh, shut up."

His voice was annoyingly smug. "Was that how I was able to snag the brightest witch of our age?"

Hermione blushed. "Maybe."

"Just maybe?"

"Well.....seeing your family's chateau in France, didn't hurt, either. I love the vineyard."

"And do you love the wizard who came with it?" he asked as he took her hand and raised it to his lips.

Hermione leaned over to give him a tender affirmative to his question, feeling especially pleased when Draco deepened their kiss into a passionate one.

Ha! Take that, she mentally telegraphed to the table nearby. He's mine.

The next day, it was Draco's turn to experience what Hermione had been feeling. When she ventured out to the beach in a bikini she'd purchased for the trip, the male population in that area dropped their collective jaw. It was not unlike Draco's reaction when she first modeled the skimpy white swimsuit for him after an afternoon of shopping with Ginny Potter. He'd been having his tea and nearly choked when he saw her, his brains immediately relocating to his pants. Growling like a
caveman, he wasted no time in carrying his wife to their bedroom and keeping her there until well past dinner. Draco knew Hermione was beautiful, but that didn't mean he wanted other men to gawk at her, although he couldn't blame them. He braved a sunburn just to make sure everyone knew his witch was taken. Following her around like a lovesick pup, he was her faithful companion as she splashed about in the waves looking for shells or when she traipsed along the beach, her hips swaying with unintentional seductiveness.

One man, a brawny, handsome Polynesian with admirers of his own, apparently couldn't resist her charms. He left his fawning groupies and made his way over to her and began to chat her up, entirely ignoring the tall blonde by her side.

*Tosser,* Draco fumed. *Hitting on my wife right in front of me.* He finally had enough. Pulling Hermione close, he kept his hand possessively on her hip and said, "Time for lunch, darling. All this sun and water has me quite famished."

Hermione, polite soul that she was, said goodbye to the native before wrapping her arm around her husband's waist to join him.

The other man's eyes narrowed in contemplation as he watched the two Europeans trudge up the beach to the open air restaurant.

*You underestimate Islanders, haole. We don't give up that easily.*

That evening, Draco and Hermione attended a beachside luau. Both feasted on laulau and poi along with the other delicacies offered. Belly full, Draco watched as hula dancers began their interpretive dance. Reaching over, he found Hermione's hand and held it firmly in his. He sighed, content and drowsy.

He was almost asleep when the dancers invited a few in the audience to join them. He was jolted awake when they came to Hermione and asked her to dance.

"I sense the magic of the island in you," said one of the girls.

Draco took a quick drink, trying not to laugh at the woman's intuition. *She must have the Sight,* he thought.

The corners of Hermione's mouth twitched, but she acquiesced to their request. They quickly outfitted her with a grass skirt and headdress; then after leading her to the front, another dance began. All Draco could focus on was his wife; her soft and fluid movements doing nothing to help the aching need for her that was always just under the surface. Not for the first time, Draco acknowledged he didn't deserve the former Gryffindor. She was perfect. Her intellect and beauty were only part of it; that she was also so forgiving, so trustworthy, so loyal……so powerful, too. The strength of her magic was rolling off of her in undulating waves. Draco glanced around at the other guests; they seemed as mesmerized by Hermione as he was, partly because she was creating a dance of her own. Not content to follow the movements of the other dancers, she was telling a different story. One he knew well. A tale of heartbreak and pain, but ultimately of triumph. Of new beginnings. Of eternal love. She looked at the blonde sitting at the front table and spoke inside his mind.

*It was all worth it because, in the end, it brought you to me. I'm yours. I'll always be yours.*

Draco swallowed hard. He knew that; of course he did. They'd chosen an unbreakable bond for their wedding vow; still, it didn't lessen the impact of that moment. She'd given her heart, her soul
into his keeping, just as he'd done with her.

He mentally answered back. *I'll never want another. I'll always love you.*

He was so caught up in their non-verbal communication, he didn't notice when a group of men gathered for the traditional fire knife dance. Soon he realized one of them was the same guy from the beach. Draco watched as the burly male finally spotted Hermione. He saw when the islander began to smile slowly, lewdly….his dark eyes glittering, undressing Hermione in his mind as he watched her dance. Draco recognized the lusty expression and gritted his teeth.

*Bloody wanker. If it wasn't for the statute of secrecy, I would turn you into calamari and serve you to everyone here.*

As soon as Hermione sat back down beside him, he whispered, "It appears your admirer followed you here. I think he's trying to get your attention."

Sure enough, the man in question was strutting and preening, obviously trying to impress. He lowered a flaming torch to his lips and gave it a kiss. He left his mouth open so that his audience could see that a single flame of fire remained. It danced on his tongue before he swallowed it. Then he pointed to Hermione and winked.

The object of his fantasy wrinkled her nose in disgust. "Was he insinuating.......? Ew. Now that's just gross. Reminds me of Cormac McLaggen. What a slimeball."

Draco chuckled even while feeling the desire to hex the man. But he wasn't about to let his wife know how angry he was. "Oh, I don't know," he said. "This one's got the moves. Look at him twirling that flaming stick."

Hermione made an impatient *hmph* sound in the back of her throat. "He better watch out or I'll light a fire to his other stick."

"I have a feeling his moves might be even more impressive if you do," snickered Draco, secretly hoping she would do that very thing.

"Shall we find out?" she whispered, her eyes twinkling in wicked delight.

Draco smiled. "That's why I love you so much. My witch is a woman of action."

Hermione giggled. Under the guise of shooing away a fly, she wandlessly sent a spell that hit the dancer directly in his pride and joy.

"Bullseye! Well done, love," Draco praised, pleased with his wife's excellent aim.

"Hope he wasn't planning to start a family soon."

Draco had no comment to that. He was too busy watching as the man's steps became frantic. He began to hop and leap, trying to put out the fire that was turning his family jewels to ash, but he couldn't find where it was. Looking down, everything seemed fine. He felt it though. Did he ever. He feared his little kahuna would never be the same, that he was doomed to a future with having nothing but a charcoal briquette dangling between his legs. He kept flapping and yelling and dancing, but nothing was helping. The audience, thinking it was part of the performance, began to cheer him on. Draco and Hermione laughed so hard, they cried. Finally, at wits end, the poor bedeviled man jumped into the ocean, effectively ending the evening's festivities along with any amorous ambitions he might have had for that night.
"Well, I think it safe to say he'll be rethinking his career choices," Hermione said as they rose to leave, totally unrepentant of her actions. "And with any luck, maybe he'll think twice before trying to steal what belongs to another again." She took Draco's hand and kissed it; then she intertwined her fingers with his and gave them a gentle squeeze. "So……what do you want to do now? Walk the beach? Take a moonlight swim?"

He let go of her hand only so he could wrap her instead in his arms. Whispering into her ear, he said, "I have a better idea."

"Oh? And what's that, husband?"

"Let's go ride a wave."

---

**A/N:** below are the meanings of the Hawaiian words I used in the story. I got the definitions from Wikipedia, so if you are a native islander and these aren't correct, please let me know.

**haole** means foreigner or white person

**laulau** is a native Hawaiian cuisine dish. The traditional preparation consisted of pork wrapped in taro or luau leaf. In old Hawaii laulau was assembled by taking a few luau leaves and placing a few pieces of fish and pork in the center. In the classical preparation, the ends of the luau leaf are folded and wrapped again in the leaf. When ready, all the laulau is placed in an underground oven, called an imu. Hot rocks are placed on the dish and covered in banana leaves and buried again. A few hours later the laulau is ready to eat.

**poi** is a Hawaiian dish made from the fermented root of the taro which has been baked and pounded to a paste.
Muggle Life

Just a sweet, fluffy little piece to go with a moodboard I made. Posted it on Tumblr. Check it out if you want. Same name, Trinkisme.

Hermione had to leave. She had to get away, if only for a bit. Ever since the defeat of Voldemort, the wizarding world had treated her like a celebrity. The public loved her, gushed over her. Followed her. It was as if they thought she belonged to them now. Everyone wanted a piece of her. It was exhausting. And poor Harry. It was twice as bad for him. She thought it would die down after awhile, but now, over a year later, it was just as bad. Maybe even worse. One day, Hermione woke up and decided she'd finally had enough. She told Harry and Ron she was taking a break from the fame and notoriety and was going incognito. She was going back to her muggle roots and was going to pretend to be one. It would be the perfect escape. Wizards wouldn't look for her in the muggle world. Especially outside of London. She needed a respite from the constant insanity. Ron thought she was nuts, but Harry looked wistful. He probably wished he could do the same, but his relationship with Ginny hindered it.

"Where will you go?" Harry asked.

"Oh….I don't know. Somewhere quiet. Maybe I can find a peaceful little hamlet near a forest." Then she gave him a playful nudge. "You know how I like the woods."

Harry grinned back. "Sounds very…..story-bookish."

"Sounds bloody awful, you mean," Ron muttered under his breath.

"Well, be careful. We'll miss you. Owl us when you get back?"

Hermione nodded, then squeezed Harry's hand. "I will, but don't worry if you don't hear from me for awhile. I'll find a little village where no one knows me. It will be nice for a change."

Ron shook his head in disbelief. After she left, he turned to his best friend. "Five galleons says she'll be back before the month is over."

Harry frowned. "Why would you think that?"

"Because 'Mione gets bored too easily. And besides, she's too used to being around people. Being around us. You watch and see. She'll change her tune."

Hermione breathed deeply. She loved the sights and smells of autumn. The brilliant reds and golds of the trees lining the lane she was walking down were magnificent in their splendor. She admired them while returning to the village after a two hour stroll around the countryside. Wood smoke
from several chimneys was drifting lazily in the air, its smell giving memory to games played in front of fires, toasted chestnuts and warm mugs of hot chocolate. Dead leaves crunching underneath her feet made her feel like a little girl again. She had half a mind to magic a pile of leaves so she could jump in them. A crisp breeze was bringing with it the warm, homey smell of apple tarts from a nearby cottage. Her stomach grumbled. She would need to go back soon to the house she was renting. Her home. Everything about it made her smile. The cheery hearth, the comfy sofa and chairs. The window seat looking out toward the backyard and beyond it to a river that was never silent, but was continuous in its message, singing to her its soft and soothing songs of peace. Only five days living there, Hermione was already in love with this place and hated the thought of ever leaving. Yawning, she turned her head and let out a small gasp. Not five meters away from her was the prettiest red fox she'd ever seen. She observed it watching her. It wasn't showing the usual fear animals had with humans; could it somehow detect she was a witch? She knew animals had an affinity with wizardkind. The steady pulse of magical energy in a witch or wizard drew them like a moth to a flame.

So preoccupied with the animal, she didn't notice that a young man leaving the village was walking toward her. When he got close enough to see her face, he stopped.

"Hermione? What are you doing here?"

That voice. That aristocratic lilt could only belong to one person. She'd just not ever heard him call her by her first name before.

Turning her head, she looked into the face of her former nemesis. Who was now sporting a very muggle-looking tweed cap and wearing ……oh, dear Merlin. Was Draco Malfoy actually wearing glasses? She felt a sudden urge to laugh and quickly covered her mouth with her hand to stop herself. She never thought she would live to see the day when Draco reminded her of her best friend, but his glasses were remarkably similar to Harry's. It kind of creeped her out. But it piqued her interest, too. In spite of the strangeness in seeing him appear so un-Malfoy-like, the look suited him and gave his icy grey eyes warmth. She noticed his cheeks were pink, whether from walking fast or from being chapped by the wind, she couldn't say. Then a thought hit her. Why would Draco bother walking anywhere when he could apparate? It didn't make sense. She felt a familiar shiver of distrust, a carryover from the war when she'd been forced to question everything. Something wasn't adding up.

"Malfoy? Is that really you?"

He grinned and nodded. "Fraid so."

"But...but…" She pointed at his face, "Since when do you wear glasses?"

"Since I found out I was far-sighted. The doctor here in the village fitted me with them. Fetching, aren't they?"

"You…you live in this village? How long have you been here?"

"Since last autumn. Right after Halloween."

That was another shock. Hermione would have thought he would be staying at the manor. "Why?"

"You don’t read the papers much, do you?"

She shook her head. She'd given up reading the Daily Prophet a long time ago.

"As part of my sentencing, I was required to live in the muggle world for a period of six months.
The point of it was to help me lose my prejudice against non-magicals.” He snorted derisively. "They need not have bothered. Living with the Dark Lord cured me forever from those."

“Six months……but shouldn’t you be done with that by now?”

He grinned once more, this one turning into a cheeky smirk. “Still as bright as ever, I see. Our most famous war heroine can count.”

Hermione's eyes narrowed as she gave him a withering look. Then she childishly stuck out her tongue. Draco thought she looked adorable.

Chuckling, he said, “I was done months ago, but lo and behold, I discovered a secret.” He leaned his head closer to hers. Hermione could smell his cologne; a sudden unbidden feeling of desire swept over her, surprising her in its intensity. Sweet Circe, where had that come from?

“How do you want to know what it is?”

She looked through his glasses into his expressive eyes. There was a secret there, all right, one that had nothing to do with his sentencing. She was immediately intrigued. “Tell me.”

“I like muggle life. Me, Draco Malfoy, Prat Extraordinaire and Abysmal Death Eater…… I like living with muggles.” His eyes sparkled impishly, almost like he’d told a good joke. “Shocking, I know, but I swear it's true. It's a good life. A peaceful one. And the townspeople in this village are kind. They don’t mind what's on my arm.” He mumbled the last bit under his breath, but Hermione heard him, anyway.

Her brows rose in disbelief. Draco Malfoy praising muggles and their way of living? He saw her expression; his smile faded and a look of embarrassment replaced it. “I know. I remember everything I said to you before. I'm sorry for it all. I was wrong. And stupid.”

He watched as she took a deep breath and wondered if his admission would be enough. Would she believe him? Or would she punch him again?

“If she does, it will be no more than I deserve,” he thought.

"Good of you to admit it,” she finally said, dimples popping out in her cheeks as she smiled saucily.

Draco stared at her for a second. Then he winked. "I'll take that as an acceptance of my apology."

Hermione laughed but then paused. A thought had just popped into her head, but she was uncertain about it. It was something she wanted to do; but should she? If it backfired on her, she would be humiliated. She looked at Draco; he was watching her intently. There was a deep emotion showing in his eyes, but she couldn't tell what it was. She didn't know him well enough yet.

Yet? Did she actually just think that? Was she hoping she would get to know him?

They had never been friends. She wasn’t sure if they were friends now. But something was urging her on. Deciding to follow her instincts, she tentatively reached out and took his hand. "The house I’m renting is not too far away." She pointed to the hill behind the apple orchard where the dwelling was. "I was about to go back and have tea. Would you…..would you like to come with me? I made some gingerbread this morning. It’s quite good, if I do say so myself.”

Draco didn't hesitate. He took a firmer grip on her hand and interlaced their fingers. They were so soft and smooth against his. Surprising her, he leaned over and gave her a kiss on the cheek.

“Thank you, Hermione.”
She knew his thanks wasn’t for the invitation to come have tea with her.

Strolling hand in hand down the lane, neither brought up the fact that the longer they walked, the closer they got to each other. But the townspeople saw it. It was a small village, after all. Not too much happened there. When the prospect for a budding romance was afoot, everyone noticed. Fact was, they’d been counting on it.

The widow bringing her cooled tarts from the window ledge back into her kitchen saw the two of them and smiled. She’d hoped the village’s newest inhabitants would meet.

Surely they’ll take a shine to each other and become a couple. For he is handsome and she’s as bonny a lass as I've ever seen. Wouldn’t it be grand if they stayed and raised their children here?

The greengrocer saw the pair and shorted. I told Thomas this would happen! He began to whistle merrily. The town clerk now owed him five pounds.

The village priest passed the couple as he made his way to see a sick parishioner. Once he was beyond them, a beatific smile broke out on his weathered but honest face. Blessed Mother of God….I hoped for this. Those two lonely souls need each other.

Unaware of all the mental matchmaking going on, Draco and Hermione talked and laughed and thought that Life sometimes surprised you in the most unexpected ways.

Draco found out that Hermione was an excellent cook; she discovered that he was an engaging conversationalist. Hours slipped away before they even noticed. Day gave way to night, but they were loathe to part. It was almost midnight when Draco realized he’d long overstayed his welcome. Sparing him a long walk back to his home, Hermione spelled their homes with a two-way floo system.

"Now you've drained your magic, Hermione. I could have apparated and kept you from that."

"Nonsense. The muggles living near you would have heard you. Besides, the spell didn't drain me. I made some modifications on the standard form and improved it."

Draco looked dubious, but she merely shrugged her shoulders. Being the brightest witch of her age did come with a few perks. One was having the creativity and expertise to update a sadly antiquated spell.

"I….I don't mean to sound ungrateful, but do you realize you just exposed me and opened my home to your friends?" People that despise me, he mentally added.

Hermione's brow furrowed quizzically. "How so?"

Sighing, he gestured to the fireplace. "You just connected my home to yours. You know how floos work. Everyone that has access to your home now has access to mine!"

She looked at him calmly. "I know. Which means me. You're only connected to this home, Draco."

He stared at her dumbly. "You haven't connected with Potter and Weasley?"

"Heavens, no. They don't even know where I am." She saw his look of complete confusion and took pity on him. "I told them I had to get away. I was losing myself in all the attention I was getting. I hated it. I needed to go somewhere where I could find peace. Where my soul and spirit could heal."
"I understand. It was the same for me," he said softly. Except the attention he'd received could no way be interpreted as adulation.

Hermione caressed his cheek with her fingertips. "When it's time, I'll reconnect with the ones I love. In the meantime, I'll send them an occasional owl. But they won't be coming here," she stated emphatically. "I warded the floos against anyone attempting access. It's solely between you and me. Okay?"

"Okay," he murmured, but Hermione saw he was looking at her lips. Stepping closer, he cradled her face with his hands. "May I see you again tomorrow?"

She swallowed and nodded. It was all she could do. Draco was now much too close. She was being sucked into his gravitational pull.

He lowered his head. Right before his lips touched hers, he whispered, "Is this okay?"

She answered by gently slipping his glasses off and placing them on the mantel. Taking that as a yes, he kissed her slowly; tenderly. When he heard her groan, he deepened it. Like their conversation, it went on and on. Time slipped by. Neither noticed.

That kiss was the beginning of the spelling of another floo system; this one between their two hearts. One that would stay forever blocked from anyone else attempting to enter.

Ron was outraged when he found out; but the villagers were happy, especially so the following year when the entire town was invited to witness their wedding.

The priest smiled down at the couple after he'd pronounced them man and wife. His prayers had been heard.

Life was indeed good.
"The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, or so I hear," came a distinctly familiar voice from the hall. Standing just outside her office, Draco Malfoy leaned against the doorway, his arms crossed with the signature Malfoy smirk in place. Hermione put down her quill and sighed. She'd been afraid of this. After her daughter had owled her about the altercation she'd had with Scorpius Malfoy, she'd known it was only a matter of time before Draco came to visit.

According to the Headmistress, Rose had marched over to the Slytherin table at lunch the day before and slapped Scorpius in the face after finding out he'd instructed his pet owl to poop on her hair while bringing in the mail during breakfast. Both Hermione and Draco received letters from their children that evening; both filled with righteous indignation of the wrongs they'd suffered while glossing over their own wrongdoing. They also received an owl from Minerva giving them a more balanced recounting of the event.

Hermione studied her childhood tormentor's face, waiting for a scowl or sneer to appear before the tongue-lashing commenced. Instead, she watched as his grey eyes softened into a kind twinkle. He actually seemed amused.

He chuckled. "I warned Scorpius not to antagonize your daughter, but he's too much like his mother. She never listened to me, either."

Relief took the place of the dread Hermione had been feeling. Letting down her guard, she impishly quipped, "Oh? Sure he's not more like you?"

The scowl appeared then. "Yes, Granger, I'm sure. I made certain of that."

She awkwardly coughed. Obviously, she'd hit a nerve. "Of course. I'm sorry, I was just teasing. I know you changed quite a long time ago."

"Yes, as do most, but they don't hesitate to revert back to their prior opinions whenever there's gossip that involves the Malfoy name." To himself, he muttered, "Always pitying my Ex, are they? Poor Astoria, my eye. That woman was a bleeding harpy."

Unfortunately, Hermione heard him.

"Was that why you two divorced?" Hermione gently probed, then winced at her audacity. She mentally chastised herself for being nosy. But she had never outgrown the desire for information. She really was a know-it-all.

He shrugged. "I was forced to marry too young….before I found out what I truly wanted." Draco eyed her steadily. "Before I realized who I truly needed."

"Yes, as do most, but they don't hesitate to revert back to their prior opinions whenever there's gossip that involves the Malfoy name." To himself, he muttered, "Always pitying my Ex, are they? Poor Astoria, my eye. That woman was a bleeding harpy."

Unfortunately, Hermione heard him.

"Was that why you two divorced?" Hermione gently probed, then winced at her audacity. She mentally chastised herself for being nosy. But she had never outgrown the desire for information. She really was a know-it-all.

He shrugged. "I was forced to marry too young….before I found out what I truly wanted." Draco eyed her steadily. "Before I realized who I truly needed."

Hermione's jaw dropped. She'd thought he'd come today to complain about Rose, but apparently he was using the occasion for another agenda in mind. As she studied his features she realized she no longer knew who he was. The cruelty, the superiority, the disdainful sneer was gone. What astonished her more was to discover that also gone was her former aversion to him.

He's absurdly handsome, she admitted to herself. Draco Malfoy at thirty-five blew teenage Draco
out of the water. There was really no comparison.

She swallowed, suddenly feeling like her office had shrunk to the space of a tiny cubicle. Before the air conditioner had apparently stopped working, too.

*Is that why it's so hot in here?*

Interrupting her thoughts, Draco casually mentioned, "You know, an office environment is not conducive to a tête-à-tête regarding marital woes......a discussion which is bound to be a lengthy one considering we'll both be contributing to it," he pointed out, making no effort to skirt around the fact that Hermione, too, was now in the same boat.

Ron had finally achieved the unforgivable. An affair would have been bad enough, but what he'd done was considerably worse in the eyes of the wizarding world. His magic attempted to destroy Hermione's one night during an argument about something insignificant; Rose preferring robes over muggle clothing. Ron's legendary temper got the better of him; he lost control. Thankfully, the strength of Hermione's core was able to withstand the onslaught of a pureblood house's power. But the damage was done. The magic of their union had been desecrated; severance of the bond was the penalty. Immediately, their marriage mark vanished from their skin; the magical bond that had joined them as man and wife snapped. Both felt it when it happened and knew within the ministry's registry of records, the termination of their union had instantly been documented. Of course, the news had spread almost immediately. The Daily Prophet had a legal section, after all. Wizarding Britain was shocked, the Weasleys mortified, and Ron.....Ron was finally out of excuses. He'd done a cut and run to America over four months ago, and no one had heard from him since.

"It's almost lunch....why don't we try out that charming new restaurant in Hogsmeade? It'll be quieter there. And more private."

"Pr...private?" she stammered.

Surprising her, he moved around her desk to stand in front of where she sat. Reaching down, he carefully pulled her up out of her chair, continuing to hold her waist as she stood, an unreadable expression on his face.

"Yes, private." Draco looked like he was bracing himself for disappointment. "Hermione, if we don't try now, another chance might never come."

"A chance for what?"

He nervously licked his bottom lip. "Love."

"Sorry?" Had she heard him right? She'd thought the end of her marriage was the end of any possibility for romance in her life, but if she was reading Draco's expression correctly, nothing could be further from the truth.

"May I?" he breathed, but as his head lowered, she knew he had no intention of waiting for permission. Hermione whimpered when his lips brushed against hers; a shiver of delight ran down her spine. It was her magic bursting with renewed joy. The mighty force of his ancient line was rising; Draco's unique signature was reaching out in an attempt to imprint on hers. To heal her from the pain of betrayal. When she felt his energies curl around her edges before sinking into her very pores, she gasped at the intimacy of it. Draco wasted no time taking that opportunity to deepen the kiss. Without conscious thought, Hermione let go and felt it when her powers settled upon the wizard who had once been her enemy.
Both knew what had just transpired. Their magic had claimed the other. All that was left was for them to follow suit.

He murmured, his voice a heavy velvet, "I wish I'd known when I was younger......how right it would feel to touch you. Kiss you. I never felt this with Astoria."

She'd never felt it with Ron either, but before she could confess it, he was kissing her again. And again. When he finally stilled, she brushed his cheek with her fingertips. "Did you know this would happen?" She ventured to ask.

He grinned, his beautiful smile turning into that teasing smirk she was quickly learning to love. "At first I wondered, because when I read of your divorce my magic surged. All the lights in the manor flickered. Made my mother drop her teacup, it startled her so." He snickered at the memory. "Then later I found myself hoping. Which is part of the reason why I told Scorpius to be nice to Rose. Can't have him tormenting his future sister, can we?"

She shook her head, overwhelmed. Cupping her face, Draco tenderly kissed the tip of her nose. "In light of what just happened, perhaps our lunch conversation should change. Somehow, I feel our sad careers as spouses are about to take a massive turn for the better."

Hermione chuckled, although her eyes were heavy with unshed tears. She had forgotten, but Life was reminding her that there was a season for everything. Pain didn't last forever. Neither did sorrow.

It was time for her Phoenix to rise from its ashes.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!