Summary

Injured in a Auror accident, Draco has lost all use of his legs. He finds solace in his physical therapist, Hermione Granger. But the road to recovery is long, hard, and full of toaster waffles.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes
Hi friends! I’d like to preface this by saying that while I do have some real life experience with paralyzation, everyone experiences this differently.

I’d like to thank my friend Cam who is a physical therapist and helped me get everything as accurate as possible and for answering my questions without question at like 2 am. (which says more about me or about Cam?)

Finally, this fic is for Emma. I hope this makes you laugh, cry, and maybe throw up a little? All my love.

It wasn’t a bad feeling. Though, it wasn’t a good feeling. There was no feeling at all, really.

He knew he had legs. When he shifted in bed, he could feel the heaviness of them keeping his hips more firmly in place.

He thought he might be wiggling his toes. Maybe. Usually he could feel the curl of them pressing under the ball of his feet. But he couldn’t feel that now.

It was much better than it had been… how many days ago was it? Maybe hours?

When he was assigned to accompany a team of curse breakers to a library that was said to be riddled with dark artifacts, he was initially pleased.

He had come a long way in the Auror department since joining some five years ago. They hadn’t trusted him, how could you blame them really? They would often stick him with paperwork or filing jobs. The only time he was allowed to patrol had been on Holidays, when no one else wanted to.

But he did it with a closed mouth and clenched fists. He worked those Christmas’ in a wet cloak in the freezing snow. He watched the New Years fireworks from his post, alone.

Until one night, three years after being hired, Harry Potter’s son was born. Which was all fine and dandy to Draco, really, because what was another Potter in the world?

Except that meant he would be out of work for at least the month. Draco would never forget the look on Ronald Weasley’s face when Teirney broke the news that unless he also wanted to sit the next month out, he would have to be partnered with Malfoy.

Draco was a good person now, at least he thought so. He had taken his rehabilitation programs seriously, he spent more time in the Muggle world than probably any of his ancestors, and he had gained a little conscience that danced between his ribcage.

But there was just something about a Weasley’s red hair and pale skin and freckles that just…

*Ron’s face was red, as it had been for the last hour of their assignment. An elderly woman had called about a strange black cat that was residing on her porch and thought perhaps it had been an unregistered animagus coming to kill her.*

*Really, it was just a cat and she was just old. But Draco didn’t mind it at all. It was the first time*
he was out of the ministry, not on a holiday, wearing his badge. Even if it was for a fluke, he was proud.

Ron had not been so understanding. Draco had to talk him down from filing a false citation against the woman for “wasting precious ministry resources”, to which Draco responded, “you think I’m precious?”

And it had gone like that for the next hour, until they passed a store promoting an Aidan Lynch meet and greet. Ron scoffed.

“Something funny about Lynch?”

“Just his technique.”

Draco scoffed next. “What do you know about technique?”

“I was the winning keeper in Hogwarts, Malfoy, against your house might I remind you.” Ron sneered, pulling the collar of his cloak more tightly around his neck.

“I remember you in Hogwarts, Weasley, you really have no place to say anything about a professional’s strategy.”

Ron’s mouth gaped open. “Oh yeah, Malfoy? Last year he let his team lose so they’d be first for the draft pick. That’s not--”

Draco sighed,”Yes it is! Strategy isn’t just how to win the game, it’s how to--”

Ron flailed his arms, “Are you serious? Are you actually serious? Why would you not play to win--”

“Strategy!”

“It’s cheating!”

“It’s necessary!”

Ron balled his fists. “Right and I bet you love the Ballycastle Bats--”

“As if!” Draco snorted. “Seriously, Weasley, I’d love to know who you’re rooting for.”

“Well obviously--”

“The Chudley Cannons.” They both said at the same time.

At first they blinked at one another. Ron narrowed his eyes slightly. “Dodney Davinport?”

“The best chaser in years.”

“And Biza Spinster?”

“The worst.”

Ron glanced around them at the shops that lined the street. “Fancy a butterbeer?”

Of all the people Draco would expect to be friends with, it had not been Weasley. But after that night things had shifted. They learned to focus on what they did have in common versus what they
didn’t.

Quidditch, butterbeer, tits.

And really, that was enough.

By the time Harry had returned from his paternity leave, the pair’s ending had been bittersweet. Draco thought perhaps Ron would go back to their “before” dynamic. But he was pleasantly surprised when, instead, Ron had invited him to accompany the rest of the Aurors for a celebrity drink for Harry’s return.

If Potter was shocked at the invitation, he didn’t show it. He had even saved Draco a seat at the bar before it got too crowded.

Perhaps the others had not come around. If Harry and Ron were away for long missions, he could go days without ever even making eye contact with someone.

This mission to the library… it was Draco’s first individual mission. Not on a Holiday. Not overnight. Not with Ron or Harry.

And sure, it wasn’t very luxurious. He technically wouldn’t need to be doing anything but sit around and make sure the curse breakers didn’t pocket any artifacts and to keep the general public away from the worksite. But he was proud. Because it was his job.

“Auror Malfoy,” a petite blonde stuck out her hand, “Penny Brewster. I’m the head cursebreaker for this extraction today. Thank you for joining us.”

Draco grunted a hello, but he was too distracted by the room around him. Of course, the manor library was much bigger. But this…

“This is the Bellview Library,” Penny noticed his awe. “Built in 1522, it’s thought to be the first magic-only book collective.” She smiled. “It’s gorgeous, but dangerous. One touch and this whole thing could come down around us.”

She had laughed after that. Like it was such an odd, outlandish thought. They were professionals. Penny herself had probably overseen hundreds of dark artifact extractions.

Except Draco’s grandmother had needed her gallbladder removed at one time. The healers at St. Mungo’s had assured them that the procedure was common. 50,000 surgeries a year. The healer had told them.

Never had an issue. The healer boasted.

And then in a matter of hours she was dead. But Malfoys don’t learn from past mistakes.

“Auror Malfoy, come take a look at this.”

In the interest of time, the team had split the library into six sections. Draco was instructed to sit very quietly, and very still, at one of the tables. Penny had graciously supplied him with the first few books she had cleared from her stacks. At the moment, Draco was engrossed in a riveting tale of the classifications of magical fish.

He slowly worked his way through the stations of workers who sat with their knees to the floor, swishing their wands across the covers and each subsequent page to check for curses.
Penny had set up shop in the far corner where magical animal books met recipes and cooking spells. Draco made a mental note to request one for Mrs. Weasley.

Penny smiled at him from her place on the floor. Her blonde hair was pulled back and just a little sticky from sweat, making the flyaways curl around her ears.

“Look at what I found,” She said in a sing-song voice.

Malfoy’s Magical Maritime, the book read.

“Did you know you had ancestors connected to magical oceanography? According to this, you great-so forth grandfather was the first to see a kelpie.”

Of course, Draco had. It was a whole study in his younger years to know all of his family accomplishments dating back to the origin of ‘Mal’, from Old French meaning ‘bad or ‘evil’ and ‘foi’ meaning ‘faith’ or ‘trust’.

His great-great-great-great-great grandfather Laurence Malfoy had indeed been the first to see a kelpie in the wild, along with the 40 or so other men he hired to find it. Bad faith.

Except genetically speaking he shared only .8% of his DNA from the man, so really, Draco was probably more related to the kelpie than to Laurence.

“I’d love to bring this to my father, if I could.” Perhaps everyone was getting historical books for Christmas.

Penny nodded, “There’s actually another book back there I haven’t pulled yet. Let me see…”

She twisted her form around until she could reach behind her. As soon as the points of her nails grazed the leather bound book, the floor under Draco rumbled quietly.

“Brewster--” Draco yelped, but it was too late. A book from perhaps a hundred shelves up was the first to fall, cracking right over her head.

She gasped, her hand moving to cradle the spot. In what felt like minutes, but was probably more likely seconds, she was yelling for her team to evacuate.

Draco watched as the wood of the shelves splintered and fell away from the wall. His heart pounded under his tongue. Penny was scrambling for her wand. Draco had left his at the table where he was told to stay very quiet, and very still. And this was why.

The books created a barrier of pages and dust and leather around them. Just before Penny grasped her wand, a shelf tore off and wooden shards sunk into the soft flesh of her knuckles. On instinct she jerked back, causing more books to topple over and bury her wand under them. Her eyes snapped to his, wide and terrified and guilty.

She didn’t think they were going to make it.

From just behind her head Draco could see another shelf give way, this time bringing the whole formation down with it.

He quickly tucked the woman under his elbows and threw them to the ground, his knees and elbows creating a human shield around her. She was saying something to him, but through the cracking of wood and the pounding of books, it was impossible to hear.
A particularly heavy book came down edges first against his neck and he hissed as he felt the skin tear.

But that was nothing compared to the heavy structure of the shelving that was now crushing him. He heard a small snap and a pain that shot down his legs and reverberated into his toes. He thought maybe the shelves had broke against his back.

But he couldn’t think, because he couldn’t breathe. He was shaking, trying to keep himself up on his knees over Penny. The pain in his legs like needles going through each nerve and imbedding themselves into the marrow of his joints. The wood around him was crushing him, pressing him down.

And before he passed out all he could think was, for all his great-great-great-great-grandfather’s “work”, Draco had never seen a kelpie in the wild.

He couldn’t feel the needles anymore, which was a good sign. Maybe they temporarily numbed his legs.

Draco poked his knee. Well, could you even feel your knees before?

He pinched his thigh. Nothing.

He drew in a shaking breath.

Hesitantly he drew a fist up and threw it down against his groin. At first he gasped and then screamed at the sheer pain of it.

In the grand scheme of things, perhaps it wasn’t the most important thing if your dick worked. But then again, small victories.

The door to his room swung open and a wide eyed man burst through. It was almost comical. Almost.

His lime green robes billowing behind him, he moved quickly to Draco’s bedside. Flicking his wand over Draco’s body where bright gold vitals appeared before him.

The healer sighed in relief. “Mister-- Auror Malfoy, I am Healer Flynn. I’ve been in charge of your medical care since you’ve been here… Do you mind telling me what happened?” He gestured to the way Draco was huddled, cradling his offended appendage.

“I hit my balls.” Draco mumbled.

Healer Flynn blinked at him. “I’m sorry?”

“I... hit... my... balls.” He responded through clenched teeth, his scrotum pulsing painfully beneath his hand. Really, why did he have to do it so hard?

The man gaped at him. “Well why ever would you do that?”

Draco sneered. “Just making sure it still hurt. It does.”

Flynn’s mouth made a small “o” before he gave Draco a sheepish smile. “Auror Malfoy, do you know what day it is today?”

“My mission was on a Tuesday and as you’ve given me no insight as to hold long I’ve been in your care, I really have no bloody clue.”
“The year, Auror Malfoy,” he seemed unfazed by Draco’s rude response.

He grumbled. “2005.”

The man nodded. “Good. To answer your question, it’s been three days. It’s 12:30 pm on Friday the 11th. You were in quite a state when you got here, Auror Malfoy, we had to magically induce you.”

Draco nodded. “Did you numb my legs?”

The healer gave him an inquisitive look. “What?”

“My legs. Did you magically numb them too?”

“No, we--” the healer checked his clipboard, seeming to try and match them to Draco’s vitals.

He placed the board down on his bedside table before moving the covers off of his feet.

“Auror Malfoy, can you try wiggling your toes for me?”

The healer seemed to be purposely keeping the covers up, just enough where Draco’s vision of his feet were blocked.

After a few moments with no confirmation from Flynn Draco asked, “Anything?”

“Can you feel where I’m touching?”

Draco snorted. “Better not be anywhere unsavory, Flynn.”

At the man’s stern look Draco cleared his throat. “No.”

The man hummed, tucking his lip between his teeth in thought.

“Auror Malfoy, I’m going to turn you on your stomach.”

Before Draco could say anything like “for easier access?” or “buy me dinner first” he was gently levitated and placed face down on the bed.

He tucked his elbows under his head to prop himself up, closing his eyes tightly as the cooling feeling of magic traced down his spine before disappearing into his legs.

In another moment he was facing the healer again. The man was licking his lips obsessively, as if he was trying to form the best words.

“Auror Malfoy, is there anyone you’d like to be here for this? Anyone I can floo?”

He thought of his mother first. But then quickly dismissed her as she would need at least an hour and a half to primp herself.

His father would not come without his mother.

If it was a Friday Harry and Ron would be in training and while he knew they would come if he asked, something pulled him back.

He could hear this alone. He could.

“No, no one.”
The Healer nodded, looking for all the world as if he was hoping for a yes to buy him some more time.

“Auror Malf-- Draco, is it okay if I call you Draco?”

“Um, sure?”

“Draco, sometimes when something traumatic happens to the spine, the nerves are severed or damaged. Um, you see, your brain delivers signals to these nerves for your muscles to move. It’s fascinating, really, there’s actually a study that suggests that--”

“Can we talk about studies later?”

Flynn cleared his throat and licked his lips, his face suddenly serious. “Right. Draco, paraplegia is what we call it when the nerves in the spinal cord are damaged and are no longer receiving brain signals to move the muscles of your legs.”

Draco furrowed his brows. “Okay…”

“Draco, you’ve been paralyzed.”

A couple of important disclaimers because this is a really sensitive topic: There will be a lot of self depreciation, some jokes centered around it. This is a really hard, sensitive topic that not a lot of fics delve into, so if I ever mess up or you don’t agree with how I’m handling this; tell me! I never want anyone to feel uncomfortable with how they or someone they love is portrayed. However, this is a pretty fluffy fic all things considered. There will be some offensive terminology used, but I felt it was necessary to the authenticity of reactions. Finally, this is not an accurate portrayal of recovery at all. It takes months, even years for someone who has paraplegia to stand.
Draco blinked once. Then twice.

“Huh?”

Healer Flynn took in a breath. “Paralyzation is when--”

“Yes, I know what it is.”

“Right, of course.”

They were silent for a moment.

“But I can feel my dick,” Draco suddenly said.

Flynn stuttered. “I beg your pardon?”

“When I hit my… When I punched my dick, right? It hurt. Obviously. So… So that has to mean something, right?”

“The nerves that control… that… are in the sacral area of the spinal cord. Have you, I mean, since you’ve woken up, have you gotten hard?”

“Well when you flipped me I was halfway there.” Draco sighed at the disapproving look given to him.

“Sorry. Reflex. No, I haven’t.”

“Well it’s a good sign you can feel pain there, anyways, it’s a good indication you can feel… other… things…” the man trailed off.

They were silent for another long moment. The healer twisting the bottom of his robes awkwardly. Draco staring at where the thin fabric of the hospital blanket stretched across his unmoving legs.

“Is it… Is it forever?” he whispered, his first seed of doubt.

When Flynn had first told him, Draco wasn’t nearly as fazed as the healer had expected. But Draco had been an athlete all his life. He had broken more bones than most of his Hogwarts team combined. There had been many instances of broken arms where Pomfrey had warned him that the next time he was so careless, he would lose the ability to play forever.

But he had kept breaking bones. Kept being careless. Because he always healed. Because Malfoys don’t learn from past mistakes.
Flynn was quick to console him, “It’s a possibility, but I never tell my patients to lose hope. I’ve seen some amazing cases, in a worse shape than you, who have gone on to walk again.”

“But?” Draco sighed, sensing the hesitation in his voice.

“*But*… Draco, you were under those shelves for a while. Hours. You had passed out and we can’t know for certain how badly that lack of oxygen affects your situation…”

“Penny!” Draco suddenly shouted, a sinking feeling in his gut. “The curse breaker I was with… Is she—”

“Fine. I treated her too. Discharged the next day. It…” The healer paused. “It was very brave, what you did.”

Draco turned away, changing the topic. “So now what?”

“Well, first we get you situated in a wheelchair—”

“Absolutely not. *Fuck.*”

Flynn sighed. “It’s the best way for you to get around, for now.”

Draco sneered. “I can get around just fine, thanks.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“And you do remember me telling you that your legs don’t work at the moment, yes?”

Draco’s sneer deepened, but he contended.

“Anyway, we’ll set you up in a chair. You’ll have a physical therapist come today to assess your situation and we’ll go from there.”

Draco nodded and Flynn opened his mouth to speak again before a small knock came to the door. He smiled, “That should be her now.”

The first thing to come into the room was curls. Wild, frizzed curls. The face being surrounded by them smiled warmly at him.

“Hello, Malfoy.”

Even though he was around Harry and Ron often, he had not seen Granger since their Hogwarts days. He had asked after her a few times, but the boys would roll their eyes and say she was always too busy to do anything but random, casual dinners.

He knew, from them, that she had gone to continue her education in the magical world in medicine, where everyone expected her to become a top healer for St. Mungo’s. Just after graduation she had ventured into the muggle world to study, as her friends called it, “*methods she thinks will benefit the magical community.*”
And now here she was, all curls and wide smiles. And for the first time in his life, Draco felt inadequate.

She had become quite attractive after their school days. Just a tad taller. Not so thin anymore. While her curls were still wild, she had grown them out to where they fell more loosely around her back.

And here he was, crippled.

“Granger.” He greeted her, affording her a small, tight smile.

“I’ll go get you that wheelchair.” He heard Flynn say before the door closed again, but he couldn’t pry his eyes away from the witch in front of him. She was looking over his chart, her nose wrinkling in thought. Scrunching up the splatter of freckles over the bridge of her nose.

“Okay, let’s see those legs.” She flipped back the entirety of the covers to expose Draco’s gown-clad body.

His legs looked the same. Well, he really didn’t spend much time looking at them before. Maybe he should have. But they looked good. Muscular. A bubble of anger rose in his throat.

*How could such strong legs become so weak, so fast?*

The anger disappeared when he watched her small hand come down over his calf and massaged the muscles there. He figured if he could feel it, it would feel nice.

She hummed and the sound shot straight to the lower appendage he could feel. He gulped, willing himself to think of the one, unfortunate time he had walked in on Ron in the Auror showers.

Freckles. Freckles everywhere.

But also on her nose. Around her cheeks.

*Bad, bad Draco. You’ve just learned you’re crippled. Priorities, really.*

He couldn’t look down at her hands. But they were right there and she was rubbing.

He jerked her hands away and she stared at him, wide eyed.

“Did I hurt you?”

He couldn’t answer because he was just trying to think of something, anything besides her small hands and freckles and lips that were pulled back in shock and big, brown eyes.

But it was too late and he could feel his gown lifting from his stomach to tent fiercely.

From the corner of his eye he could see Granger’s eyes flicker down before sighing in relief.

“Oh, that’s normal. I was generating blood flow to your legs. I promise I won’t take it personally.”

He furrowed his brows and went to say something smooth or flirtation, but Healer Flynn had decided at that exact moment to come through the door with a huge, metal contraption.

“Oh good!” He heard the man say, “Your sacral area is fine!”

Draco groaned. This. This may be worse than paralyzation.
Hermione spent the next hour massaging and bending his legs. She told him it was to prevent clotting and sores, which promptly cured his erection.

Healer Flynn had left almost immediately after he dropped off the chair, explaining that he had a few other patients to attend to that day. Hermione had smiled and told him they were fine.

When the man left, Hermione turned a sad smile to him. It wasn’t pity, which he was afraid of. He hadn’t even had time to feel bad for himself yet, let alone from other people.

It was a smile that said “I feel bad about what I have to say, but I’m going to say it anyway.”

“I told them not to contact your parents when you came in. I wasn’t sure…” She trailed off.

Draco cleared his throat. “No, it was a good call. Thanks.”

Draco could only imagine Narcissa and Lucius Malfoy stepping into this situation. She would probably be crying in a way that was still flattering to her face while his father spoke of “cripple, useless, not a viable suitor for pureblood women.”

He didn’t think he could handle that now. Not even he was trying to wrap his own head around “cripple, useless, not a viable suitor for pureblood women” for himself.

Not that he much cared for the later portion.

He didn’t think his parents would be worried about where he was. He doubted they’d even notice.

“Harry and Ron having been asking about you,” she said, as if on a brighter note, running her thumbs along the bottom of his feet, which at one point may have tickled.

He hummed. “What did you tell them?”

She shrugged. “Nothing. Just that your vitals were good and we expected you to wake up soon.”

He snorted. “Wake up as a cripple?”

She frowned, stopping her motions. “Don’t call yourself that.”

“No, you have a disability. You’re not a disability.”

He opened his mouth to retort, but then thought better of it. He cleared his throat. “So what do I call myself then?”

She pursed her lips and tilted her head. “Draco. Ferret if you feel so inclined. Handsome bloke in the wheelchair.”

His heart swooped into his stomach. “You think I’m handsome?” Even like this?

She smirked, but didn’t answer.

“Okay, now we’ll show you how to get into your chair.”
He groaned. “Why can’t I just use those walking sticks?”

“You mean crutches?” She wheeled the chair to the side of him.

“Yes, those.”

She pulled a lever just on the side of the wheel forward. “Your legs aren’t strong enough right now to support your body. We’ll work on getting them built to stand, but for now you need to learn to get into your chair by yourself.”

He nodded. “Why couldn’t someone just levitate me into it?”

“Well, what happens if there’s no one around?”

Oh. It wasn’t meant to hurt, but it did. What if no one was around to help him?

Hermione noticed his fallen face and rolled her eyes. “Stop. I just meant if, say, it’s the middle of the night and you need to pee and everyone is asleep.”

Well, that made sense.

“Anyway, you’re going to be relying on your upper body strength to get you in and out. Right now your legs are a dead weight and it’s going to take some time to get used to compensating for them. This,” she pointed to the lever she pulled. “is the break. Always, always make sure it’s in place before trying to get in. Or else you’ll be here,” she pointed to the floor, “while your chair is there.”

she pointed to a far corner of the wall.

Draco nodded.

“Good,” she smiled brightly. “Now, shift yourself so that your back is facing the chair-- good, like that-- and reach behind you, feel for the arm rests. Great, now use those muscles and pull yourself back into the chair.”

He tried to mask how his upper arms shook with the exertion of balancing all his weight. He flopped into the chair ungracefully, part of his legs still caught up on the bed and his medical gown bunched around his thighs.

But the way Hermione squealed when he made it in made him feel like he did alright. He even puffed out his chest a little.

“That was great, Malfoy. Really, truly excellent. Now pull back the lever to release the break.”

He did and the chair started to roll back, his legs falling ungracefully between him.

She bent in front of him and his eyes widened suddenly, a very erection inducing thought coming to him. This time he was able to stay strong.

“This is a foot plate,” she turned them down and gently lifted his legs to rest on them. “This will help your legs not get in the way of your wheels.”

She stood up and dusted off her pants. He hadn’t noticed before what she was swearing; a simple pair of muggle jeans and a nice blouse. She looked young, but professional.

“Now use your hands on the bars of the wheels to push yourself forward.”

It was much easier than he thought. It was very similar to a broom the way he glided.
“Excellent.” She smiled at him and he smiled back, his first real one since he had been awake. He thought maybe her eyes had flickered to his lips for a moment before she cleared her throat.

“Getting into bed alone will be a bit trickier. I assume your bed in the manor is quite high, but we can always lower it to make it easier for you.”

He frowned. “Oh right. I have to go home, don’t I?”

She pulled down her lips to a half-smile and nodded, but then paused. “You know, Harry and Ron wouldn’t mind having you stay with them--”

Draco shook his head fiercely. “I’m not... I’m just not ready for anyone to know yet. Even the thought of telling my parents…”

He trailed off and turned his face to the side so she couldn’t see how hard he was biting his cheek to keep his emotions in check.

“You know,” she started hesitantly, “you could stay with me.”

Draco’s head snapped in her direction. “What?” he asked, incredulous.

He meant it in a way that was “how could you be so nice and invite me into your home after all I’ve done to you?” but the way she cringed and started fidgeting with the edge of her top told Draco she had taken it in a way that was not as he intended.

“I know it’s not... ideal…” he opened his mouth to correct her, but she pressed on, “But I often have patients come to my home so it’s already accessible for your chair. And I would be there incase you needed help and it would give you some time to--”

“Yes.”

She looked up at him sharply. “Really?”

“Yes, I’d-- thank you. I’d like that.”

She smiled at him and he didn’t think he’d ever get used to how bright, how warm, how genuine it was.

“Brilliant. Let’s get you changed and packed to go.”

Her home was like the physical embodiment of her smile.

While Draco was accustomed to foyers, her front door led directly into her living room. Yellows and greys and whites decorated every inch.

While Draco’s couches were made out of leather, hers were a plush linen with dozens of pillows that, judging by the wrinkles and indents, looked like they were all used regularly.

She let him wheel himself around her home. She was correct, the house was very accessible for his chair. Even the doorways seemed a little wider to accommodate him.
And he breathed a sigh of relief when he noticed the toilet had a handle attached to the side. He could piss sitting down as long as he could do it alone.

Hermione had insisted helping him dress and he had requested that he at least be able to put his underwear on by himself.

It took much more energy than he thought to get the fabric around both legs and up without the help of lower body movement. And he was thankful when Hermione helped him with the rest.

But pissing, that was where he drew the line.

“Your room is through here.” She nodded to a doorway at the end of the hall.

It was more a library than a bedroom, really. Books were piled on top of one another straining the shelves and Draco flinched just a little at the memory of shelving coming down on him.

A small, lowered cot was set against the wall.

“My bedroom is right next door. But the walls are pretty thick, so instead of screaming for me I’ve set up these.”

She held out a coin to him. He took it in his palm and rolled it around his fingers.

At his arched brow, she laughed. “I’ve added a protean charm to them.”

Draco nodded and a guilty feeling settled in his gut. Of course, he knew all about protean charms.

“If you need anything, just use this.”

“What if it’s an emergency?”

She laughed. “I guess then would be appropriate to scream, yes?”

And it felt good to make her laugh.

After they got him set in bed and the covers were tucked around him, he laid restless.

It hadn’t hit him yet, he didn’t think.

He should be crying, right?

Or angry.

But maybe he just felt this was karma coming back. For everything he had said to Hermione. For using the protean charm for evil. For ignoring Madam Pomfrey.

The coin heated in his palm where he had his fist clenched around it.

*I can hear you thinking through the walls. Go to sleep.*

He smiled. *Goodnight, Granger.*

*Goodnight, handsome bloke in a wheelchair.*

He fell asleep soon after.
Find me on tumblr: dirty-mudblood.tumblr.com

Support the protests: https://minnesotafreedomfund.org/
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

TW if needed: Phantom limb pain

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It had been five days since leaving the hospital and they had started their own routine.

Hermione would wake up at the ass crack of dawn to do… whatever it was she did. And Draco would wake up at the same time. She was right, the walls were thick and muffled any slight sounds, but Draco would strain his ears to hear her. Opening and shutting doors. Shuffling pots and pans. Laughing at something on what she told him was the “telly.”

She would come into his room around 8:30 or so in the morning (on the weekend she had let him stay “sleeping” until 10) and help him do stretches. She’d let him eat his breakfast in bed (waffles of the toaster kind) before they would work on his mobility exercises.

The first few days he could barely move his hips enough to swing his legs over the side. Now, he had a little more control. Hermione showed him how to use his hands to position his knees and his feet to make the movements easier.

After their exercises, he would get himself into his chair and explore the grounds. On the weekend she had introduced him to her cat, Crooks, who he was very careful to not wheel over with his chair. She also showed him how to access the back garden and how to operate the television.

On Monday she had woken him up at 8:30, done their exercises, and while Draco lounged in front of the television she had gotten dressed for work. This time in a pair of thick spandex leggings and an old quidditch tee-shirt. Her hair was pulled back into a messy bun and he watched as she laced up her sneakers.

“What do you do at work?”

She smiled at him. “It varies every day. I’m a visiting physical therapist which means I go to several facilities when they require my help. Today I’m off to the Holyhead Harpies training center to assess some players’ injuries.”

Draco frowned. “Athletes need physical therapy?”

“Everyone can benefit from physical therapy, but yes, especially athletes. Their bodies go through massive amounts of trauma that are often ignored, which is why you see them retire so young. If you’re careful and diligent with your injuries and stretching you can prevent…” she bit her lip.

“Becoming a cripple?” Draco offered for her, snorting.

She pouted. “What did I say about that word?”

He rolled his eyes. “Becoming handsome men in wheelchairs?”
She laughed and he felt the reverberations of it in his soul. “Sure. Except the Holyhead Harpies are all female.”

She stood and grabbed a handful of floo powder and stepped into the fireplace.

“Do you want to take a picture of me with you? A “this could you” incentive?”

She threw her head back and laughed. “How do you know I don’t already carry a picture of you, Draco?”

And she was gone before he could realize she had said his name.

At night they would say their partings after Hermione supervised his move into bed. And then they had their nightly routine.

Once he was positive she was settled into bed as well, he would send a message through the coin, often questions.

*Favorite color?*

*Purple,* the coin glowed after a moment, *you?*

*Green*

He thought maybe he could hear her laugh through the thick wall.

*You’re not really a man of many mysteries*

*I have some*

*Like what?*

*My favorite animal is a pony*

*You mean a horse?*

*No, a pony*

And that time, he could definitely hear her laugh.

Every night since then they passed questions back and forth until one of them had fallen asleep with an unanswered question.

Often (always) it was Hermione, who would then make sure to answer it over breakfast the next morning.

Their routine was comfortable. And there were a lot of things he let her do for him. Like pulling up his long trousers or reaching for something when he forgot his wand in the other room.

But there were also things he refused help with. And bathing was one of them.

The bathtub was daunting. Although it also came equipped with a bar, the bottom of the tub was much lower than he was used to getting himself down on his own.

Hermione begged him to let her help, but he always denied it. For five days he *scourgify’d* under his arms and around his pubic area.
The thing with Hermione, the thing he was appreciative of, is that she didn’t overstep. Even if she saw him struggle for something, she let him try first. She waited until he asked for help.

And he couldn’t believe he was about to do this but…

“I need you to help me bathe.”

He had wheeled up to her while she sat at the dining table, a book in one hand and a coffee in the other.

He knew he didn’t smell bad, but his skin felt like there was an extra layer on it and his hair was greasy.

She swallowed her mouthful of coffee and closed her book.

“Okay.”

He waggled a finger at her, “But you will not, I repeat, not look at my privates while you do so.”

She covered a laugh with a cough. “I’ll manage.”

Draco blinked. “Excuse me?”

“What?”

“Well, what is that supposed to mean? You’re too good to look at my junk?”

This time she did laugh. “Make up your mind, Malfoy. You want me to look or you don’t?”

He sputtered.

“I was on the run with Harry and Ron for months. We took frequent baths together in various lakes. I know how to keep my eyes to myself.”

He sniffed the air haughtily, pleased with her answer. “Fine,” he turned his chair to the bathroom. “Come along then.”

It didn’t look so intimidating with water and bubbles in it, which he was thankful for.

True to her word, she helped him into the bath carefully, keeping her eyes on his shoulders and arms as she levitated and positioned him in the bath.

When she moved away to sit on the toilet and cracked open the spine of her book, he frowned.

“What are you doing?”

She peered up from the top of the book. “Pardon?”

“I thought you were giving me a bath.”

She blinked at him. “Your arms work, don’t they?”

For the duration of the bath he was red, which had nothing to do with the hot water he was sitting in.

That night, tucked into bed with the coin between his fingers he sent,

Did you enjoy the show?
You told me not to look
Are you saying you didn’t?
I’m a woman of my word
What if I made you promise to not buy anymore books for this bloody room?
Well I’m not foolish enough to make that promise
Fair
Then after a moment, *what was your favorite class in Hogwarts?*

The next moment he was awoken by voices. It was a Thursday which meant Hermione had off from work and often let him sleep in as she did. But he could tell from the sleep that still stuck to his eyes that it was quite early.

If he could hear words through the walls, he knew they were being loud.

“Harry Pot-- Ron! You both get back here right now! Do not--”

But the door was already swung open and two shit eating faces stared back at him.

“Long time, no see, mate.” Ron said first, moving into the bedroom and flickering on the light.

Draco groaned and threw the pillow behind his head over his face.

“Weasley, how are you *this* unbearable *this* early in the morning?” his voice was muffled by the pillow.

Harry chuckled and Draco felt the end of the bed dip down where the man sat.

“How are you feeling, Malfoy?”


Ron snickered. “Here, here.”

When he removed the pillow from his face Hermione was staring at him with a furrowed brow and bitten lip. He wanted to untuck and kiss it.

“They haven’t… told them,” she said carefully, “why you’re here.”

“It must be pretty serious if you’ve traded in your persian silks for Hermione’s guest bedroom cotton.”

He heard, more than saw the book being thrown at the red head.

Draco cleared his throat. He had been preparing for the near week he had been here to discuss this.

“I’m paralyzed.”

The boys blinked at him, their mouths open just slightly.

“What?” Harry asked first.
“When the shelving came down, it damaged the nerves… or the spine… something. It damaged something and now my brain can’t tell my legs to work.”

They were silent for a moment.

“What?” asked Ron this time.

Draco sighed. “Big boo-boo on back. Draco no walk-walk,” he pointed to his chair at the side of the bed.

“Merlin, Malfoy… But what about work-- ow, if you throw one more book at me, Hermione, so help me--”

“How do you feel?” Harry asked instead and they all turned to look at him.

“Fine,” he nodded.

And it was true, actually. Sometimes during the day he would struggle with something that used to come so easy to him and he’d have to press the palms of his hand into his eyes to stop the frustrated tears. Or at night once Hermione fell asleep mid-question and he was forced to lay there and deal with the situation alone, sometimes slamming his hands down onto his thighs; hoping that maybe at one point he’d feel something again.

And if Hermione ever noticed the bruises she, thankfully, did not comment on them.

But other than that, Hermione made life normal. She gave him chores to do while she was at work.

“If you’re going to be living in my house, you’re going to have to contribute.”

They weren’t hard chores and ones that more likely than not he could use magic to do. Clean the dishes, pluck the weeds from the garden, fold the laundry (which he did do by hand) to name a few.

He appreciated it because not only did it give him something to distract him, but it also made him valuable to her. It made him a part of her everyday life that wasn’t just as a patient. When she gave him those chores, she relied on him too.

He refused to think about what life would be like when he inevitably moved out of her cozy home. Do you think she’d let him keep her cat?

Hermione crossed her arms. “He’s doing really well. Extremely.”

Harry nodded and played absentmindedly with a stay piece of fabric from the quilt. “Do you… I mean… do you know if it’s forever?”

Hermione furrowed her brows. “I… We--”

“They’re still not sure.” Draco answered for her.

“Bloody hell,” Ron whispered, shaking his head. “But what about-- do not hit me with that, Hermione, do not-- what about work? You’ve come so far in the department, Malfoy, you have. The bosses have just started coming around to you...”

He shrugged, but he felt a piece of his resolve flake away. He had done so well not thinking about this. Until now.

“They didn’t want me there when I could walk, I doubt they’d want me there now.”
Everyone was silent and Draco thought that it was worse than them being loud and asking questions.

He cleared his throat. “So, you tracked me down. Did you need something?”

Harry and Ron shared a glance.

“Your mum owled the department yesterday, asking after you. She said you hadn’t been home in at least a few days,” Draco snorted, “and was hoping we would point her in your direction.” Ron explained.

“I’m guessing,” Harry’s eyes flickered to Draco’s quilt-covered legs. “you haven’t told them.”

Draco licked his lips and shook his head. Another piece flicking away. He could feel the panic rising in his throat and when he met Hermione’s eyes, she gave him an understanding look.

“Well, boys, please tell Mrs. Malfoy that Draco will be contacting her soon. We have to work on our exercises now, but maybe you can join us for dinner later this weekend.”

She ushered them out, the boys saying soft goodbyes to him. He heard the rushing of the floo before Hermione came back into sight.

“Exercise?” Draco asked expectantly, already sitting up on his hands to move himself up, until he saw her shake her head.

“It’s still early. You should get some more sleep.”

Before she left, she turned slightly, her hand on the doorknob. “I know that was really hard, but you did great. You should consider when and how you want to tell your parents soon, okay?”

Draco swallowed. “I’ll think about it.”

And fitfully, he fell back to sleep.

When Draco woke next, it was to a stabbing pain in his legs. At first he was relieved at any feeling past his hips, but it quickly dulled as the sharp throbbing intensified.

“Hermione,” he yelled and before he could open his mouth to call for her again, she was by his side.

“Draco, what’s wrong? Talk to me. Tell me what’s going on.”

“It hurts.”

In hindsight, it wasn’t that bad. The pain. It was more like the throb of falling legs first onto pavement. But he hadn’t felt his legs in so long, the shock mixed with the fear intensified the feeling.

She moved to uncover his trembling hands from where they were pressing over his thighs. “Your legs? Your legs hurt?”

He whimpered as she started to massage the muscles of his thighs, but it didn’t dull the pain even for a moment.

“Draco, you’re having phantom pains. Okay? They’re not real--”
“We sure as fuck feel real,” clutching at his legs again.

He cried out when Hermione left his side, dashing into her own room before returning with a small vial.

“Open, please,” she poured the contents down his throat. “It’s not real, okay?”

She quickly propped his legs up, using the pads of her thumbs to knead the unmoving muscles of his legs.

He felt the contents of the potion slip down his throat and haze his mind. His back untensed and his hands unclenched from his sides.

His eyes were slipping closed, fluttering at the attempt to stay awake. To watch the witch in front of him who was still massaging his legs even though the pains that had apparently not been there subsided. To watch the way her lips trembled as she told it that it would be okay, it would be fine, he would be fine, she would take care of him.

And before his eyes finally closed, he thought maybe he saw a tear fall onto his calf.

The next time he awoke that day, the orange light of the window told him he had slept through most of the afternoon.

Hermione was curled up on a chair she must have dragged in from the kitchen, her legs propped under her and an open book resting against her knee.

Her eyes were closed, flickering back and forth behind her eyelids in sleep. Her mouth was parted and each intake of breath was caught on her tongue before she slowly exhaled. He wondered if she had been there all day.

She looked beautiful like this, peaceful and relaxed. He wondered if this was the only time she gave her mind a rest, but then again he knew by the slight twitch of her nose and her brow that she was deep in thought, even in sleep.

The corner of her mouth was wet with saliva, which was a stark contrast to the dryness of her bottom lip from her mouth breathing.

He wished he could walk.

It had been the first time he let himself say it.

He wished he could walk.

He could go to her, easily. Stand up and crouch in front of her. Run his thumb over the slight drool and spread it over her lip. Kiss her just as her eyes fluttered open.

He wished he was strong enough to carry her to bed, pull her to him, sink into her without the dead weight of his legs setting him back.

But he couldn’t get up. He could barely get himself into his chair without collapsing. Hermione
had warned him about weight bearing in his shoulders, that if he focused all of the exertion there instead of his arms he would overuse them.

And of course now his shoulders ached and his hands were sore from the constant wheel movements and he just felt so helpless laying there and he wondered if she would ever be able to look past his inabilities and see what he could do.

He had gotten very good at garden work. Even though he plucked the weeds with his wand, he pruned the roses by hand. He could give her the most beautiful garden, if only she let him.

He would buy her acres of land that he could access with his chair. He would spend hours there, making sure every bud opened for her.

But that wasn’t the future he was getting.

He would probably return to work after begging (or bribing) Robards to keep him on as an Auror who only did clerical work. He’d definitely have to move out of the manor. There were at least five flights of stairs just to get to his bed chambers.

His mother would somehow find a pureblood bride for him, who probably wouldn’t have loved him anyway and especially not now.

He would have children who he would never be able to teach to fly or play quidditch. Would they be embarrassed of him more because he was a former Death Eater or because he’s a crip—handsome bloke in a wheelchair, his brain corrected him.

Hermione’s breath stuttered and her eyes flickered back open, her hand moving quickly to her mouth to wipe away the saliva while her tongue darted out to wet her lips.

“Oh, Draco,” she gasped when she noticed him staring, “I’m sorry, I must have dozed off. Have you been awake long?”

He shook his head.

“Why…” he paused, “Why did that happen? I thought maybe…” maybe my legs were working again.

She licked her lips, untucking her legs from under her and wincing when she felt they were asleep from being in that position for so long.

“It’s assumed that the remaining nerves in your spinal cord and your brain rewire when they lose signal to the missing,” she used her fingers for air quotes, “limbs. Usually when your brain feels something is wrong, it sends a signal of pain to that area-- like that time you touched the stove prematurely, even though I told you not to.” She wagged her finger, moving to his bedside to assess his legs.

“So you’re telling me… all the pain is in my head?”

She rolled her eyes, “Don’t be dramatic. I’m not saying that pain isn’t real, per say, but it doesn’t happen like you think it does.”

“Am I going to be feeling them forever?”

She shook her head, rolling her thumbs down the sides of his knees. “We usually see it in the first six months. Before your brain catches up to your body.”
She pressed her thumbs into his shin. “Granger, can I ask you something?”

She nodded, now kneading his foot.

“Do you… seriously, do you think I’ll ever walk again?”

“Yes,” she answered immediately and then bit her lip, seeming unsure.

“What is it?”

She sighed, letting go of his foot and sitting at his side on his bed. He shifted over as much as he could to give her more room.

“Nerves in the spinal cord don’t… regenerate easily. They’re hoping that your injuries didn’t create too much scar tissue so that they can…”

“But?”

She took his hand in hers. If this was another time, a different conversation, he could appreciate the thinness of her fingers and the warmness of her palm in his.

“I saw you when you first arrived, Draco. It wasn’t… It wasn’t pretty, let’s say. I’ve seen some bad injuries, but seeing you…” She shook her head, her breath coming out a little harder than before.

“As my patient, I can’t promise you anything. I can’t. I can’t promise that you’ll walk or even stand again because it’s a very real possibility you won’t. It doesn’t matter how strong or stubborn Draco Malfoy is, sometimes there’s just nothing you can do. But we’ll keep going. Forever, if you want to. Until you decide when it’s enough. Okay?”

And he let himself cry. On his back, small sobs shaking his shoulder while tears ran down his temple and his breath hiccuped in his chest. He didn’t look at her, but he could feel her own tears dropping into their joined hands and sliding between their intertwined fingers.

“Okay.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you all for the support for this fic!

Updates every Sunday~
It had been a week since Ron and Harry’s visit and Hermione had, blessedly, not brought up the topic of his parents visiting for dinner again.

Their morning exercises had become more involved as well. Hermione said their first goal was to get him to stand with support, but that his hip abductors needed work for his side to side stability, making sure his knees don’t cave in during the initial joint movement.

She had placed a band around his knees and showed him how to hold it firmly in his hands. Hers were small and warm and dry.

“You’re not very flexible.” She commented when he pulled and his knee barely made it past his belly button.

He scoffed, “I am plenty flexible, wouldn’t you like to know.”

His chest stammered just a little. He really hadn’t meant for it to come out that way.

Her hair was covering her face and the only inkling that she understood was that her once dry hands were now clammy and holding his a little tighter. But it could have been his imagination.

At one point she had added weights to his ankles, which didn’t quite make sense to him but when he asked she went into a rant about “posterior tilts” and “weight shifts” and “recoil force.” To which he never asked again.

His hips and legs did feel quite a bit stronger. He had always been on the leaner, bonier side. But a week of consistent weight pulls and stretches had curved some muscle over his hip bone. He wondered if his ass looked better, too. Maybe he could get Hermione to stand him up in front of a mirror to look.

He had begun to look forward to their morning work-outs as well. Her hands were always warm in the morning, perhaps from cradling her cup of coffee. He had learned not to watch said warm hands massage the muscles on his legs, lest he have to conceal a fierce erection while pulling his legs up and over. But the mornings were for them.

The eighth morning after Harry and Ron’s visit, Hermione burst into his room lugging two metal sticks under her arms.

“New fashion accessory, Granger?”

She gave a simple snort of a laugh, “For you, yes. Malfoy, meet your four point gait.”

He blinked, “What do you know about my gait?”
She gave him a funny look. “I don’t think I want to know what you think it means, but this is a four point gait. They’re crutches to use when your legs are weakened.”

He wouldn’t have pouted (because Malfoy’s have a weakened nothing) but instead, a thrill raced through his body and under his tongue.

“Am I going to try walking today?”

He hardly recognized the sound of his own voice. Maybe he had sounded this hopeful, this awed, once in his life. When his father had hinted on his seventh birthday that, perhaps, Draco had gotten a, maybe, first broom.

Hermione couldn’t help but smile. It was beautiful. It was crooked and made one eye close a little more than the other. Draco swallowed.

“Not walk, not yet. But we’re going to try standing. Do you think you’re--”

“Yes,” Draco cleared his throat, a blush staining his cheeks. “I mean, yes. I’m ready.”

Hermione positioned him at the edge of the bed, with his feet flat on the floor. She showed him how to put on the crutches. It had a thick brace right at the top where she slipped his forearm in. Her hands were still warm from her coffee. She was so close, her breath smelled like it too. She was concentrating hard, her nose crinkled and her brows together, saying things like, “and your hand goes here” and “put your wrist like this.”

But he could only concentrate on the way her hair brushed against his elbow and she was bent just so where he could see that in the morning, Hermione Granger did not wear a bra under her tee-shirt.

“Are you ready?”

He was snapped out of his daydream of long curls and bare breasts by the owner’s voice.

“Yes.”

“It won’t feel right when you stand right away. Use the crutches, okay? That’s why they’re here. You’ll have to use your upper body and core strength we’ve been working on to--”

“Hermione,” he interrupted and he held back a smile when her mouth popped open in surprise at hearing her given name. “I’m ready.”

She let out a breath that was half amused, half shaken. Draco wondered if she was worried. If she was worried for him.

His first attempt at standing was almost laughable. He had barely gotten his ass off of the bed before he gave out and flopped backwards.

He almost blushed when he realized Hermione was watching him intently. He didn’t want her to think him weak, or pathetic. But she didn’t laugh. Didn’t even gasp. She just straightened his crutches and nodded at him to try again.

He took a deep breath in, then out. His shoulders were still sore from the constant use in the wheelchair. His hands were calloused from the wheels. Even his forearms were more sore than usual. But he could do this. He could. They had been working towards this.

He took one more breath and without letting it go, beared it down into his stomach and pushed off
of his elbows. This time Hermione did gasp.

He forgot how tall he was.

Her hands were around the upper part of his torso, just almost under his armpits, to keep him steady. He had never stood this close to her, he didn’t think, ever. She was so small. Even hunching down against his crutches to hold himself, she was under his chin. She was smiling like she was proud and he couldn’t even take a moment to celebrate that he was proud too because her mouth was so fucking pretty and her lashes were long and dark and the breath that puffed against his chin still smelled like coffee and warmth and her.

Slowly the smile slipped from her face. A slight flicker of her gaze to his lips too. Did she realize she tucked her tongue out to wet her bottom lip? Did he realize he did it too?

She swayed forward, just a little. Just enough. Her bottom lip was plump and had a slight divot in the center that held the moisture of her saliva.

“Hermione?”

She jumped away, her eyes wide and frantic. In the jump, she had pushed him just a tad too hard for his already unsteady balance and he fell back onto the bed with a loud oof.

“I--” Hermione went to speak, but Harry and Ron were already barging through the door of his room.

They were quite the pair. Hermione with a red face that flushed past the collar of her shirt and Draco shooting the boys the most menacing and threatening of scowls since Hogwarts.

“Are we… interrupting anything?” Harry raised a brow over his spectacles.

“No!”

“Yes.”

Hermione shot Draco a glare that rivaled his own.

“We were just practicing standing.”

“Yes, Granger excels at it.”

She frowned at him.

“Mate! Standing?” Perhaps the only person more thrilled with Draco’s progression than he and Hermione, was Ron. “Show us! Come on then.”

“I’m not your pet, Weasley.”

Harry rolled his eyes, “Anyway, we’re sorry to barge in. But we thought it be best to warn you--” he shared a look with Ron.

“Well? Spit it out, then. Not much of a warner if you don’t get it out before it happens.”

He couldn’t feel it, but could see Hermione kick his foot from the corner of his eye.

“Your mother came to the Auror office today--’”
“And before Harry goes any further, please know that we are your very, only friends and had no choice--”

“And she threatened the department with a suit if we didn’t disclose your location--”

“Which Robarbs didn’t like very much--”

“But we already have so many pending tickets against us--”

“So really we had no choice--”

“Spit it out!” Hermione finally interrupted them.

Draco forgot how sexy she was, all riled up.

“Your mother knows you’re here, with Hermione. Paralyzed,” Harry stuck out a letter, “and she’s invited herself and your father over for dinner.”

“Why don’t you make them those breakfast waffles?”

Hermione gaped at him. “You want me to make your parents toaster waffles for dinner?”

“Well, yes--”

“You want me, Mudblood Granger, to make your parents, aristocratic Pure Blooded Malfoys, toaster waffles?”

Draco frowned. “Don’t call yourself that.”

She laughed and ran two shaking hands down her face.

“I’m serious. If I can’t call myself a cripple, you can’t call yourself a Mudblood.”

Hermione scoffed from behind her hands. “That’s completely different.”

“No,” Draco tutted. “Look, what was it you said? You’re not a Mudblood, you have mud blood.”

There was a beat of silence.

“Wait… I believe that came out wrong.”

But then she did something amazing. She laughed. So loud it didn’t even sound like it could come out of her tiny body. Rolling through the room until he was laughing. Until they were laughing together.

She sighed, a content one, before grasping his hand in hers. “I think we’ll be okay.”

“Yes,” Draco smiled, “We’ll be okay.”

In the end, Hermione had decided on a baked chicken and roasted potatoes, which in her nervousness, were burnt to an inedible crisp.

After some consoling and good-natured teasing from Draco, she had instead called for takeout and instructed Draco to hide the boxes while she platted them.
At 6:15, just under 20 minutes before their expected arrival, he heard Hermione utter a soft “shit” under her breath before he heard her fumble out of the kitchen.

“I put a stasis charm on the food, I have to get dressed. If they come before I’m out, let them in and take them straight to the dining area, yes?”

“Yes, ma’am.” He threw a pretzel in the air and caught it in his mouth.

He felt the bowl being taken out from under his arm. “And stop eating pretzels. You’re going to ruin your dinner.”

Draco rolled his eyes, but then kept them firmly glued to her behind as she rushed into her room, her bum jiggling deliciously under her jeans.

Thank Merlin for Muggle clothes, truly.

But he knew she was trying to make a good impression on his parents, more than “hello, I know at one point, and probably now, you hated me and watched my kind dead, but I’ve been taking such good care of your poor, crippled son that I feel we should move past this. Wine?”

It was 6:27 when she emerged from her room, hooking a pair of shiny diamonds into her left ear. Draco could tell they were fake, being who he was, but a part of him loved that she probably didn’t care either way.

When his eyes trailed down the rest of the way, he swallowed.

A black, perhaps a dark blue dress with small white dots. Long, flowing sleeves that fell and billowed around her elbows. The dress cinched and tied at her waits before falling just to her knees, a little longer in the back. Her hair was still wild, she may have only taken a few seconds to run her finger through and pat it down at the top.

“What?” She asked when she noticed his staring, “Is this not okay?”

“No, it’s… You look lovely.”

He only had a moment to appreciate the beautiful blush that graced her face before there was a slightly too loud knock at the door that drained all color from her face completely. He wheeled himself in front of her and squeezed her hand. “We’ll be okay, remember?”

She squeezed back. “Technically I should be the one comforting you.”

He laughed and slipped his hands from hers, already missing the warmth of them.

“Malfoys don’t need comfort.” He winked, before opening the door.

If you asked, “Draco, what was the most awkward moment of your life?” before today, he wouldn’t know.

Malfoys, by rule of thumb, do not feel awkward. Maybe agitated, but never awkward.

But this? This was awkward.

His parents had barely acknowledged them. Didn’t even let Hermione take their coats. Wiped the dining room seats before they sat.
“So… Ms. Granger, how are we progressing with,” she gestured towards Draco, “this.”

Hermione choked slightly on her food at being addressed. She wiped the corner of her mouth with her napkin before she responded. “I beg your pardon?”

“Well that’s why he’s here, isn’t it? You will… make him normal again?”

Draco watched the corner of Hermione’s eye twitch. “He is normal--”

Without looking, Draco knew the snort from the other end of the table was his father. “He can’t walk. There’s nothing normal about that.”

Hermione ran her tongue over her teeth. Her eye twitched again. She opened her mouth to speak.

“I stood today.” Draco interrupted her.

Narcissa blinked, “Well, that’s fantastic, isn’t it? You’re well on your way to recovery.”

Draco gave his mother a small, sad smile. It was wrong to have given her that hope when he didn’t even know himself if there was any “recovery” to be had.

“And we appreciate you keeping this out of the papers, Ms. Granger, you can imagine we’re not exactly looking for this to get out, yes?”

Hermione nodded, not trusting herself to speak. They fell into a thick silence.

“How much would it take to… expedite this process?” Mr. Malfoy asked, taking a long sip of his wine and sneering at the subpar quality.

“Pardon?”

“How many galleons to have him walking, say, by November?”

Draco swallowed a lump in his throat and even though he could feel Hermione’s eyes on his, he didn’t return the stare.

“It doesn’t… exactly… work like that, Mr. Malfoy.” She said tentatively.

He paused with the wine glass halfway to his mouth. “How do you mean? Name your price.”

She wet her lips. “It’s a long process to get someone with this level of injury to walk, if at all, and-”

Draco closed his eyes when he heard his mother gasp. “If at all? Are you telling me he… Are you saying…”

“Is my son stuck as a cripple, Ms. Granger?”

“Don’t use that word in my house.” He heard her hiss.

Lucius ignored her. “Well, is he?”

“I could be.” Draco turned to face his father for the first time. “And then what?”

His father’s eyes narrowed. “And then what? I stepped aside when you wanted to pursue your silly Auror dreams instead of taking over the company. I assumed you’d get it out of your system before
finally settling down and I could retire. And then what? No investors are going to want to do business with someone who can barely wipe his own ass without help—"

“I can, can you?” Draco hissed through his teeth, but his father was already moving on.

“And then what? What Pure Blood girl will want to have heirs with you? Does your cock even work?”

“Lucius—” Draco heard his mother warn.

He was moving his jaw back and forth, flexing his hands at his side. But he said nothing. Because part of him knew his father was right, anyway.

His parents stood.

“You can come home when you can walk through the door.” Were his father’s last words before he disapparated straight out of the dining area.

Narcissa had small tears clinging to her lashes when she kissed Draco on the cheek. “We’ll figure it out, My Dragon,” she whispered in his ear. “Use your personal bank account if you need to. I’ll add some more funds.”

She gave a polite nod to Hermione. “Thank you for having us, Ms. Granger. If it isn’t too much trouble, could you send along the recipe for these potatoes to my house elf?”

Without any more of a goodbye, or waiting for Hermione’s answer (which really would have been the phone number to the steak house down the road), she followed her husband.

Draco didn’t even know he had started crying until he felt two small thumbs wiping them away and shushing him, his head pressed into the soft material of the dress he had loved so much.

“Can you make me waffles?”

She let him sleep on the couch that night with the telly on. The soft blue glow of the TV lit the walls and the sound of an audience laughing filled the room. The couple on the screen had been fighting all episode, neither one wanting to admit their feelings to one another.

The box underneath glowed a green 3:30 before he felt the coin in his pocket heat up against his hand.

You okay?

I’ve been better.

When?

He almost said this morning, when they were about to kiss. He almost said every morning with her arm hands and coffee breath.

When I could walk.

Were you happier when you could walk?

The obvious answer was, yes. But had he been? Was he happy in the Manor, alone in his wing?
Was he happy at work filing hundreds of papers? Was he happy going on date after date with well-suited women that were dreadfully dull, with real diamond earrings?

No.

*Happiness isn’t determined by walking.*

*No matter what my father says?*

*I wouldn’t listen to a thing Lucius Malfoy says.*

*He used to tell me I was the greatest Seeker Hogwarts had ever seen.*

*See? That should have been your first clue.*

She was joking with him. His lips lifted up just a bit. It quickly slipped from his face.

*Do you think he was right when he said no one will love me like this?*

*I know he wasn’t right.*

His heart lurched.

*Yeah?*

There was a pause and Draco thought she may have fallen asleep.

*But then, How can anyone not love you? Goodnight, Draco.*

And he fell asleep, the two characters on the telly finally kissing for the first time.
Thank you all so so much for the love, the comments, and the kudos! We’re more than halfway done and while this isn’t a traditional fic, I’m so appreciative of everyone who has given it a chance!

It was a little harder to tie his tie while in a wheelchair, with his elbows knocking against the arm rest. Hermione had taken the day off of work for perhaps the first time in years, all so that she could escort him to the Auror department for a meeting with Robarbs.

The building looked quite a bit bigger than Draco remembered. He also had never noticed there had to be at least a thousand steps.

He quirked a brow at Hermione as if to say, well, are you going to carry me up or shall I crawl?

She rolled her eyes and instead tilted her head to guide him around the side of the building.

Draco had never been around the back of the ministry before. While the front was gleaming and marbled, the back was a mossed brick with piles of boxes against the walls.

“Hello, Ms. Granger, Auror Malfoy.” A voice called from a small doorway. “You can come right through here.”

The burly man gave the pair a look that was to say, see? Isn’t it lovely we have an entrance for you?

Draco sneered, but held his tongue as the man led them through the building.

“What’s the bloody point of stairs anyway?” He grumbled in a whisper to Hermione.

He saw her shrug. “Structural integrity?”

He grumbled something inaudible that may have been something like, structural integrity the skin between my ass.

The elevator up was much longer, starting from the very bottom floor. It stopped at each department where workers would shuffle in and out, not caring about the personal space or how one man’s clumsiness had gotten Draco’s finger stuck in between his wheel.

It wasn’t that Draco was embarrassed of his position. Really he was just sitting, if you thought about it. Kings used to sit and be carried around, didn’t they?

No, he just didn’t understand why they had perfectly well-working legs and still did not take the stairs. He huffed and grumbled more with each floor, which caused Hermione to give him a sly pinch on his neck. Behave.

The Auror office was exactly how he left it. Meaning, piles of papers stacked on a far wall that no
one would even bother sorting. With a frown, Draco wondered if he was now destined to spend forever as a clerk. He fidgeted with his tie.

“Well look who it is! Alright, Malfoy?” Robarbs came bounding out of his office, sticking out a hand to Draco.

He took it. “Robarbs. I see you’ve yet to get a new bitch boy to sort your impossible paperwork.”

The man laughed, gesturing for the pair to come into his office and shut the door behind him. “No one does it quite like you though, Malfoy.” He turned his smile to Hermione and raised his brows, as if noticing who she was for the first time. “And I’ll be. Ms. Granger, what a delight.”

He stuck out his hand as if to shake it in the same manner as he had with Draco, but instead bent down to place a soft kiss on the tops of her knuckles.

Draco would have been a bit miffed by the gesture if he wasn’t trying to contain his laughter at the sheer horror on her face. He did snort, just a little, when she pulled back and rubbed her hand against the side of her jeans before taking a seat next to him.

Robarbs took his own chair and folded his hands together.

“First I must say, Malfoy, that I am sorry I misjudged you for most of your time here.” Draco blinked.

“I’ve led many men and women as Aurors and I can, maybe, select a handful that would jump in the way of falling debris to save someone,” he cleared his throat. “With that said, I am also sorry for what it means for your physical… situation.”

Draco blinked again.

Robarbs sighed, “Look, Malfoy, as brave and commendable as your actions were: I can’t justify keeping you on as an Auror.”

Draco’s heart lurched into his throat and without looking down, felt a small hand squeeze his.

“And don’t think I didn’t push for you. Because I did, really. I think you would be valuable in the field no matter your,” he coughed, “condition.”

Draco rolled his eyes. If someone was going to say he was paralyzed, they may as well have just fucking said it.

“However, I couldn’t convince the board that the risk was worth it. I’m sorry.” Hermione gave his hand another squeeze. “But, I couldn’t leave you empty handed, now could I?”

He extended his arm and waved his hand in a “come hither” motion at the door.

When the blonde woman stepped into the room, Draco felt Hermione’s hands slip from his.

He blinked. “Penny?”

Even though he had only met her once, for only a moment, she looked so familiar. A faint scar that split across her brow was the only indication that she had been in the same situation he had.

“Auror Malfoy,” her voice was like the sun. It reminded him of Luna Lovegood. She gave a polite nod to Hermione before shifting her eyes back to him, “I never got to properly thank you for saving my life.”
She stepped forward and bent down, placing a sweet kiss against his cheek that burned his face. Draco couldn’t help but to glance sideways at the woman sitting next to him. She wasn’t even looking. With a frown and a disappointed tug at his heart, he realized she didn’t care.

He turned back to Penny. “It was nothing, really.”

She shook her head. “No, it was everything. I can’t even imagine…” she shook her head again, looking down at his legs. “We were all very lucky for you to be there that day.”

Draco gave her a tight smile.

“Ms. Brewster and her team were very impressed with you, Malfoy.” Robarb added and Penny nodded along.

“Yes, you were so quick and smart on your feet,” Draco blushed at the compliment. “We could use someone like you on our team.”

Draco’s mouth popped open.

“What?” He heard himself and Hermione exclaim together.

Penny smiled. “It wouldn’t be as glamorous or exciting as being an Auror. It’s mostly research into spells and counterspells. Perhaps a couple of days in the field per year.”

Draco couldn’t find his tongue to speak. Penny pushed on.

“I completely understand if you’d prefer not to, with everything that happened--”

“I would.” Draco interrupted, ignoring the gaze burning through the back of his head.

“Yeah?” Penny replied, not at all miffed at being interrupted.

Draco smiled. This was his. “Yeah.”

She squealed, a sound that was very girly and very shrill. Draco just knew Hermione was rolling her eyes at the sound. But he couldn’t be fucked to care. He was a curse breaker. A parapalygic curse breaker.

He wondered if that was a prize at the end of the year Ministry function.

With one more kiss on the cheek, Penny said her goodbyes. In a daze, Draco shook Robarbs hand and followed Hermione out of the office and into the broader Auror department.

She still wasn’t looking at him, but did glance up when two grinning fools stood in their path.

“Congratulations, Cursebreaker Malfoy,” Ron said, slapping Draco on the shoulder.

Draco, although grinning, raised a brow. “How is it I just found out mere seconds ago and you know already?”

“It’s been in talks with the ministry since your accident. They needed Robards and your past partners to sign off on your good behavior before the Cursebreaking Department would take you.”

“You’ve known for weeks and didn’t think to mention it to him?” Hermione scolded.

The pair shrugged. “He needs some excitement in his life.”
“Weasley, you don’t think losing use of my legs,” he gestured to himself, “is excitement enough?”

The boys blinked at him and then each other. “Well... But this is so much better, isn’t it?”

Slowly the grin spread back onto Draco’s face. “Yes, it bloody well is.”

While the three boys whooped and hollered at Draco’s new found success, Draco watched Hermione give him a tight smile. For a moment, he wondered if maybe she was getting tired of lugging him around and caring for him.

She probably missed quiet days with her cat and her books and her toaster waffles, instead of the constant bustling and bickering that came with living with Draco Malfoy.

He hadn’t, even for a moment, considered her thin lips were in response to Penny’s, whose own had touched him. Twice.

A buzz in the distance and a rapid, whispered fire of “shit, shit, shit” that tumbled out of her mouth had brought all three men to look at Hermione.

Her beep beep thing (a rager? pager?) was buzzing rapidly in her hand.

“I’m sorry to break up the festivities, boys, but I have a work emergency and need to get Malfoy home—”

Draco frowned. Just last night she had called him his name, his given name. Even this morning when she brought him his waffles, it was “Draco.”

“Naw, Hermione, let him stay with us!”

Draco watched her mouth twist into a concerned grimince and she bit her nail, her eyes moving from Draco to the beep beep in her hand.

“I don’t think—”

“Come on, ‘Mione,” Harry said, “All we want is to take him for a round of drinks to celebrate his new position. We’ll have him back in all his pieces before you’re even home.”

She bit her nail harder and Draco watched it splinter between her teeth. She deserved some time away from him.

“Granger, really, it’s okay.” He tried to give her a smile that was reassuring. The beep beep was being persistent and she sighed.

“Okay... Okay.” She turned on Harry and Ron with one finger pointed. “I am trusting you two to be adults and look out for him. We haven’t been out to the shops yet, so keep a close watch on his chair and—”

But they were already pushing her towards the elevator. “Yes, yes, yes, of course, no problem, sounds great.”

By the time the doors closed in front of her she had shot Draco one look. Behave.

Draco expected more people to stare, really. Maybe they were, from the corner of their eye. But any time he would try to look around, Harry or Ron would move his attention away from the crowd.
Unfortunately the Leaky had a few steps in the front as well and, not wanting to have the two idiots in charge of lifting his chair, they settled for a few bottled butterbeers and takeout from the bar.

There was a hill overlooking the village that Ron helped Draco get up in his chair before settling transfiguring a blanket to lay him on.

It felt good. It felt normal. If he reached his arm out, he could run his fingers through the grass. He took a sip of his beer.

“How has it been living with Hermione?” He heard Ron ask.

Draco shrugged, watching a cloud pass by in the shape of a rabbit. “Good. She’s… I mean you know her. Bleeding bloody heart.”

Harry chuckled, “Sure, but how’s living with her?”

Draco blinked, swallowing another sip of his beer. “I’m afraid I don’t know what you mean.”

“We’re asking if you’re enjoying playing house with her. Not that we want to hear specifics or anything, honestly, please spare us the details—”

“Don’t be crass, Weasley.” Draco sneered, the clouds now forming into one giant bubble, “there is no specifics to be heard.”

“Yeah? Didn’t seem so when we walked in the other day.”

Draco scoffed. “That was nothing—”

“You seemed awfully close,” Harry suggested.

“She was helping me stand. Of course we were close.”

Ron and Harry shared an eye roll over his head, but dropped the subject all together.

“How was dinner with your parents?”

Draco’s lips turned up in a grimace. “No comment.”

“That bad?” Ron chuckled, opening another bottle to pass to Draco.

“My father said I could only come home if I could walk home.”

The boys were silent for a moment.

“That’s… about as expected from Lucius, yes?”

Draco rolled his eyes, “Course. My mother wasn’t much better. They’re more concerned that I won’t be able to find a nice Pure Blooded bride to take me and my father has all but disowned me.”

Harry sucked on his cheek audibly. “And what did Hermione say during all of this?”

“There’s not much she could do,” Draco shrugged, tucking an arm under his head, “She tried, of course, to defend me. And my state. But she wasn’t saying what they wanted to hear. Merlin, he asked me if my cock worked in front of her.”

“Well, Malfoy, next time they come ‘round just— look at me, look at me— say fuck you, my cock works, can’t say the same for you, and stand up for yourself!” Ron tossed his fourth bottle behind
him, reaching for a fifth.

Draco and Harry blinked at each other.

“You… want me to,.. stand up for myself.”

“’Swhat I said.”

“You want me to.. stand up… for myself.”

Harry was already laughing, grabbing his glasses from off his nose to pinch between his eyes. Draco couldn’t contain the smile that was cracking his face.

“Don’ know what you lot are laughin’ about,” Ron pouted. “Jus’ givin’ some good advice.”

“It’s wonderful, Weasley,” Draco gasped through a laugh. “I can hardly stand how good it is.”

Harry was howling, Ron was grumbling, and for a moment: it was like nothing had changed.

A broom raced and popped the bubble in the sky, swallowing the rider whole. Draco remembered flying. Remembered how cold and moist the low hanging clouds were. He sighed wistfully. Everything had changed.

“Miss it?” Harry asked.

“Fuck walking. Fuck the extra few minutes it takes me to get off the toilet. But flying? Yeah. Yeah, I miss flying.”

Harry gave him a sad sort-of half smile.

“Well why can’t you fly?”

Harry and Draco turned to Ron’s voice.

“Do we need to go through the events of the past month for you, Weasley?”

Ron gave a rude gesture with his hand, “Do you use your legs to fly, Malfoy? No wonder you were so shit.”

Later, Draco, Ron, and Harry would all claim it was the butterbeer. They had quite a few each by that point. And it was such a nice day out. And, really, they couldn’t think of one reason why you would need legs to sit on a broom.

Later, they would say they didn’t know how they got the broom. But they did. Harry drunkenly (don’t tell Ginny) apparated home and back, thankfully without being harmed.

Later, they wouldn’t be able to call how they got Draco onto the broom and up into the air.

But they would always remember the moment they realized, yes, you need legs to balance on a broom especially when drunk, when Draco tumbled sideways off the broom.

“Mr. Malfoy, I can’t say I’m excited to see you again. Given the circumstances.” A shining light spoke much too loudly.
Draco shook his head away from the probing hand and closed his eyes tightly to the blinding light.

“*Nox.*” He heard the voice say and Draco let his eyes crack open.

Deja vu.

Healer Flynn smiled at him.

“Wha’ happened?”

His head was killing him. He tried to put up a hand to rub his temple but flinched when he was met with a nasty wound.

“You took quite a plunge off a broom. I’m considering a punch card for you. Every tenth Mungos visit is free.”

Draco sneered. “Har har.”

Healer Flynn’s face fell serious for a moment.

“If you think a spine injury is bad, Malfoy, a brain injury can be worse. You’re lucky your friends brought you in when they did.”

“Where is--”

The door swung open. “Malfoy! Merlin, did you give us a scare.”

Harry and Ron were still in their Auror robes, windswept and grass stained. Draco concluded it was probably the same day.

He smirked, “I--”

But then Hermione trained in the room. His face fell, hers was stern. Her arms crossed under her breasts.

They stared at each other for a moment, the silence thick and awkward.

“I best be leaving you all, then. Malfoy, I’m going to go submit your release forms. Please try to make it at least a few months without another visit.”

The sound of the door clicking shut echoed in the room long after he had gone.

“Well?” Hermione asked them all after a moment.

Harry looked sheepish, while Ron looked purely indigent.

“He wanted to go flying--”

“And you thought that was a good idea?”

“Well, I didn’t think it was a bad idea--”

“He could have seriously hurt himself. He could have loss use of his *arms.* He could have *died.*”

Ron scoffed. “He’s *fine*--”

“How would you like to live with no arms or legs, Ronald? No arms and no legs is basically how
you exist right now, you don’t do anything.”

Ron went to retort, but Harry placed a hand on his arm. “We’re sorry, ‘Mione. And you too, Malfoy. We should have been more careful.”

Hermione tightened her arms under her chest. Her eyes were blazing. Her hair crackled with magic. Fuck, she was gorgeous.

“You shouldn’t have done it at all.”

“We--”

“Just,” Hermione put up and hand and sighed. “Just leave. Please?”
Without a word, the two left.

Draco suddenly found the corner of his bedding quite interesting.

“Are you okay?”
When had she gotten so close?

She was looking at the floor. Her arms still crossed, but slouched slightly.

“Yes.” He whispered.

She looked up then and being so close, he saw the red veins in her eyes and the swollenness of her cheeks. She had been crying.

For him?

I’m sorry, he wanted to say, I’m sorry you took me into your home and made me feel not only normal, but special. I’m sorry that I don’t think I can go any morning without toaster waffles that you make so well. I’m sorry that you deserve for me to leave so you can find a man who can carry you over the threshold or carry you into bed when you fall asleep on the couch. I’m sorry I made you cry. I’m sorry I’ve always made you cry.

But he couldn’t say anything. Because right when he opened his mouth, a fist flew right into his shoulder.

He yelped in pain, grasping the offended area. “What the fuck, Hermione--”

“What is wrong with you? Have you lost it? One minute I’m with a patient and the next Harry’s patronus is in the room telling me you cracked your head open!”

New tears were falling now, her shoulders were slumped and shaking. Her hands, though tiny, were shoving his arm, his shoulder, his chest with every sob.

“I was so worried, I--”

Draco caught her hand in his just as it flew to hit his chest. Her hands were cold. Her coffee breath long gone and in its place, the smell of peppermint from a Pepper-Up potion.

She was close now. Even closer than she was in his bedroom. Did she know she had little flecks of gold in only her left eye? Or that the color of her lips were darker around the seam?
“Thank you for being worried about me.”

His whispered breath blew a curl away from her face and her eyelashes fluttered.

On an inhale, her breath was shaking. Anticipating.

Draco thought of her rose garden. Fuck a garden. He would buy her a conservatory, so the roses would never die. He wouldn’t let him.

He pushed his back off the bed lightly to meet her in the middle.

“Draco?” She whispered, her bottom lip grazing his lightly and he shivered.

“Draco?” A louder voice called out from somewhere in the distance.

The pair jumped back from each other.

Standing in the doorway: matriarch, aristocrat, cock-block Narcissa Malfoy.

Chapter End Notes

There’s a US The Office quote in here. Can you spot it?
Chapter Notes

This chapter is a little shorter, but I hope you forgive me! Only one more chapter left and then the epilogue. Thank you SO much for the love on last chapter! I didn't get to respond to everyone, but I love you all so much!

Hermione wiped her mouth, even though nothing was there. One time Draco had received a nasty sunburn from a prolonged quidditch practice and he still had not been as red as she was now.

It would have been quite adorable if his mother was not blinking at them from the door.

“Ms. Granger, may I speak to my son alone?”

Hermione gave a squeaked “sure”, before all but running out of the room.

His mother arched a brow, smoothing down her robes. “Was I interrupting something?”

Draco glared, but said nothing. His mind was playing some colorful vocabulary, however.

“I came as soon as I heard.”

“Mhm.”

“I was at the Greengrass house actually.”

“Hm.”

“They have a daughter. Well, daughters. You know Daphne, she married Blaise Zabini last summer. She has a younger sister, Astoria, do you remember her?”

“Mm.”

“Well, I told them about your… affliction… and Astoria seemed more than genuinely interested in you.”

Draco scoffed. “She seemed interested in my legs or in the vast fortune you’ve obviously offered her?”

His mother’s face was set. Unwavering. “You need someone to take care of you.”

“I have someone to take care of me.”

He blinked. So did she.

“Is this… about Ms. Granger?”

He said nothing.

“My dragon,” she sighed, finally moving from the door to sit at his bedside, where Hermione had
once been. She smoothed the hair from his forehead, being careful to avoid the scar. “I have no doubt she… cares for you very much.” She was choosing her words carefully, speaking too slowly. “But we must be realistic here.”

His heart dropped into his stomach and swam in the acid, then brought the bile back up to his throat. She was saying it, without having to say it.

_Even if she’s a Mudblood, you don’t deserve her._

_You take what you can get._

_You’re a burden._

_You’re a burden to her._

_You’ll always be a burden to her._

_You’ve always been a burden to her._

Draco swallowed. This was his mother. The woman who carried him, who fed him, who bathed him, who taught him to walk. And now, Hermione Granger was doing those things.

Did she think of herself as a motherly figure? His insides churned. Did she feel an obligation to him as a mother does? Did she let him prune the roses to appease him as a mother would let their child stir the cauldron so as to give the appearance of them “helping”? He felt wrong. It felt tight in his belly where the beer from the morning and the narcotics swam to ease his pain.

“Draco.” His mother said again when he didn’t answer. “I need you to know I’m not saying this from a place of hate for-- her. But a place of love for you.”

She pressed her thumbs against the indentation on the side of his chin. “That house is no home for you. What are you to do when she decides she wants a boyfriend? A family? Will you be Uncle Draco who sleeps in the spare room in a wheelchair?”

He felt his chin quiver under her fingers.

He thought about her, about Hermione, with a husband. Probably tall and athletic, with dark hair and kind eyes. He would be a muggle-born too, or at least half-blooded. He would know how to work the toaster properly. He would know how to work the muggle appliance that spit out coffee in the morning and make it for her each day before work.

They would have children. Two, at least, because she had mentioned hating being an only child during one of their coin conversations. A boy and a girl with curly hair and long teeth and the kind eyes of their father.

Draco wondered how it would feel to wake up in the morning and watch Hermione give her husband a lingering kiss over fresh waffles. Of staring into her children’s kind eyes that weren’t a sharp silver.

With a tug in his chest, he knew she would let him. A mother wouldn’t throw out their child, especially if they relied on her.

Their coin conversations would end, of course. What husband would allow their wife to have
intimate, secret conversations in their marital bed with a man only a room over? He would be forgotten.

He didn’t answer still, but Narcissa nodded. “Astoria is a good girl. A sweet girl. She’ll make the perfect Malfoy bride.”

When his mother left and Hermione came back in, a coffee in each hand and his release forms under her arm: he ignored how her warm hands felt so good on his back when she helped him into his chair.

“Would you like to get something to eat?” She asked as he wheeled away.

Without turning back to her, “I want to go home.”

She was ignorant to his souring mood, only smiling softly that he had called her house “home.”

He was pissy from the moment they stepped out of the hospital.

First the floo ride was too bumpy. Then the water in his bath was too cold. Then the toaster waffles were too soggy under the syrup.

Finally, Hermione had enough.

“What crawled up your ass and died?” Hermione hissed when he rudely complained about the amount of cat hair on the couch because she let her cat lay on it like it owned the place.

“You’d like to know, wouldn’t you?”

Her mouth was opening, her eyes wide. He hadn’t been so nasty, so arrogant, since Hogwarts.

“Is this...” she whispered nervously, “is this about the k-kiss?”

He wasn’t looking at her, instead flipping through the telly channels. “There was no kiss, if your memory doesn’t serve well.”

She snatched the remote out of his hands and flipped off the TV, ignoring his enraged “hey!”

“Look,” she hissed back, “I don’t know what your mother said to you when I left, but there’s no reason to take it out on me. I have been nothing-- look at me-- nothing but good to you. And I don’t expect any gratitude, but I do expect some respect. I know this is hard. I know you’re tired. I know your arms hurt and you miss flying and I can’t imagine how you must be feeling about what your parents said, but the world doesn’t fall at your feet because Draco Malfoy is upset.”

“No, Granger, you’re right. No one is falling at my crippled fucking feet.”

She scoffed and hopped off the couch, cradling her hairy cat under one arm. “You are impossible. Stay here or get yourself into bed. I’m going to sleep.”

He didn’t look at her when she left the room. Didn’t even flinch when the door slammed shut behind her and rattled the walls.

But on the telly, the couple from the other night was now arguing. And that didn’t sit right with Draco. Just the other day they had been perfectly happy. Kissing and hugging and in love.

Hermione had warned Draco the moment she introduced him to the Muggle contraption that the
people, the stories, were fake. They were like actors in a play, except in your home and they couldn’t see you.

But it felt so real. It felt so guilty.

He took the coin out of his pocket and sent a message.

*I’m sorry.*

But for the first time, she didn’t respond.

End Notes

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