Changing Scenery

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Summary

Seven years have passed since the war ended. Hermione has everything she's always wanted, but she still isn't satisfied. When she mentions she's bored to Harry, she didn't think that her boredom would be alleviated quite this way. And she definitely didn't expect to see Draco Malfoy again after all these years, and not like that.

Well, she certainly wasn't bored anymore.

Notes

My first fic! This is a work in progress, and I'd love to hear any and all feedback!

Disclaimer: I own nothing but the plot, everything you recognize belongs to J.K. Rowling. Just having some fun with her delightful ideas!
Hermione Granger was *bored*. She tapped her fingers irritably on her desk. She'd finished all her work - not for the day or the week, but all the work that she had set out to accomplish when she started at the Ministry of Magic. There would always be more work to do, of course, but she had overhauled the department which would do it and there was no real need for her to personally oversee the work anymore. She had been responsible for restructuring and staffing the renamed Department for Magical Creatures. She had finished the work she'd started with S.P.E.W., and she was wise enough now to see the naivety in her initial project. In addition, she'd worked to rewrite the legislation regarding other magical creatures like werewolves and centaurs to make it more inclusive and less demeaning. It was an uphill battle, but her staff, mostly young and muggleborn, worked hard at it.

With all the work she'd put in to make the Department functional and fair, she had essentially written herself out of a job. There were now plenty of people equally committed to fair treatment of all magical beings and she no longer had to be at the forefront of every campaign, using her influence and name to get people to pay attention. Hermione had already begun, discreetly, to look for a replacement. She hadn't announced her resignation yet because she didn't want to deal with the fallout from various interested parties, not the least Kingsley Shacklebolt, who had stayed on as Minister of Magic after the war.

A knock on her door interrupted her decidedly negative thoughts. "Come in," she called.

A familiar face poked around the door. "Hey there," Harry said, smiling.

Hermione straightened in her chair. "Harry! Come in, sit down! What brings you here?"

Harry strolled in, hands tucked in his pockets. "We had a lunch date, remember?"

Hermione looked at her watch in a panic. "Merlin, I didn't notice the time! I'm so sorry!" She stood and grabbed her cloak off the back of her chair.

Harry laughed. "You never remember. That's why I always come ten minutes early."

Hermione blushed and then shrugged. "You know me too well."

Together they walked out of the Ministry and into Diagon Alley. It was the Ministry lunch hour so most places were busy; they chose a less popular cafe off the main road to sit and eat. After ordering they began chatting.

"How's work?" Harry asked, leaning back in his chair. For all that he was seated comfortably, he had still chosen a table and seat that afforded him a view of the whole restaurant and the door.
Hermione blew a strand of hair out of her face. "I'm thinking of resigning," she admitted.

Harry leaned forward, his eyebrows raised. "Really? What prompted this?"

"I'm bored," she said, going for honesty. "Everything I wanted to do at the Ministry is either done or in the capable hands of my staff. All I do anymore is supervise."

Harry smiled wryly. "I can see why that would be unsatisfying for you."

"Exactly. So I think I'll resign. Felicity McAllan is more than able to take my place, and I think she'd enjoy the challenge of running a department. I'm just not cut out for paperwork."

Harry nodded. He'd met Felicity a few times when dropping by the department to visit Hermione and she'd seemed like a very competent witch. "So what will you do instead?"

Their food came, giving Hermione a moment to think. After they'd each taken a few bites, she responded.

"I'm not entirely sure. Nothing sounds appealing, and it's hard to go job hunting while trying to keep people from realizing that's what I'm doing. I've sent out a couple feelers, but nothing yet." She sighed. "Anyway, what's new with you?"

Harry shrugged. "I just wrapped up a big case, so I'll be doing paperwork for a week. And I hate paperwork almost as much as you do."

Hermione laughed. "I'm sorry for your suffering. At least being an Auror is exciting more often than not."

Harry raised an eyebrow. "You'd be surprised. Honestly, mostly it's just minor things and domestic complaints."

"Sounds like you need a change of job as well."

Harry shrugged. They chatted inconsequentially until they'd both finished eating.

As Harry helped her with her cloak, he sighed. "I'm going to hate myself for this, but you should talk to Malfoy."

Hermione turned, flipping her hair over her collar. "Malfoy?"

"He's looking for a liaison for some of the magical creature communities," he explained.

Hermione quirked a brow. "And you know this how?"

He shrugged, his hands shoved in his pockets. "Aurors hear things."

Hermione looked at him askance. "I'll consider it."

He blew out a breath. "Okay. I'll see you this weekend?"

Hermione nodded. "Of course."

When she got back to her office that afternoon, she looked at the stack of paperwork that had somehow accumulated in her absence and groaned. Shrugging out of her cloak, she resigned herself to another late night.
The next morning she arrived in the office before everyone else, as usual, feeling tired. Tired, more like dead exhausted. She sipped from the cup of coffee she'd bought on her way in as she walked to her office. The paperwork she'd finished the night before had not alleviated her boredom; rather, it had affirmed her decision to resign as soon as possible.

As she went through another batch of forms that needed her signature, the first people started trickling in, most popping by to say hello.

"Morning, boss," Felicity said, poking her head in the open door.

"Felicity! Good morning, come in, I wanted to talk to you about something," Hermione said, indicating the seat in front of the desk.

Felicity dropped neatly into the more comfortable of the two chairs that sat in front of Hermione's desk, knowing from long experience that the other chair had a loose spring that Hermione purposely didn't fix.

Hermione waved a hand to close the door and put up silencing charm.

"What did you want to talk to me about?" Felicity looked curious, but not apprehensive.

"How do you like working here?"

"At the Ministry?"

"In the Department."

Felicity looked thoughtful. "I like it here. The work is interesting and fulfilling."

Hermione considered her answer before asking her next question. "Why did you decide to work here?"

Felicity's eyes shuttered. "My cousin is half werewolf. He lives up with the pack in Scotland now, and he's happy there, but back when he was a kid, he wasn't allowed to attend Hogwarts. He got his letter, but at the time he was living in a wizarding town in England and they weren't...receptive to the idea of a half-werewolf among the students."

"How was he educated, then?"

"When the Alpha of the pack in Scotland heard, they offered to take him in. They have a werewolf tutor who teaches the kids living in the pack. His mother, my aunt, couldn't get rid of him fast enough." She grimaced.

Hermione sighed. "I wish I hadn't heard stories like that before."

Felicity nodded. "I visited him every summer growing up, and I still get up there now and then. He's happy, but I didn't like the thought that some prejudiced wizards drove him from his home and very nearly kept him from learning magic." She blew out a breath. "Why do you ask?"

It was a similar story to what Hermione had suspected, and it confirmed her belief that Felicity would make an excellent Department Head. She had the drive and the motivation to want to keep pushing against the obstacles, and the organization to keep the department running.

"I'm thinking of resigning, and I want you to take over for me," Hermione said simply.
"Oh!" Felicity's eyebrows rose. "Why?"

"Because you're competent, organized, driven, and passionate and would make an excellent head of this department," Hermione replied, knowing that she wasn't answering the question Felicity had really asked. "Does the position interest you?"

"Yes, of course!"

"Excellent, then I'll plan on naming you my successor."

"Well, thank you then." Felicity looked a little stunned.

"I'm not stepping down yet, but I will soon. I haven't put in my official resignation, so I would prefer if you would keep this to yourself until I announce it."

Felicity nodded. "I understand."

"Brilliant. Now, how are you coming with the Prouhurst case?"

Felicity shook her head as if to clear before replying. "Good, I should have the paperwork for you by the end of the day."

"Perfect. Well, have a lovely day." Hermione smiled and waved a hand to open the door. Sounds filtered back in from the hallway and office outside.

"You too, and, thank you again." Felicity grinned.

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Two days later, Hermione was putting the finishing touches on her resignation - she wasn't planning on handing it in until next week, but she wanted to have it written out - when her door was flung open. A harried-looking Auror she vaguely recognized stood there, panting.

Hermione stood. "What is it?" The last time something like this happened, they'd found an illegal unicorn-breeding facility.

"They didn't say, only said to come fetch you and to make it fast."

Hermione nodded sharply. "Give me two minutes."

The Auror stepped outside, and Hermione hastily packed up her office. The parchments on her desk went into a locked drawer, she grabbed her cloak and purse, and then scrawled a hasty note for Felicity, which she sent winging through the office with a wave of her wand.

"Right, let's go."

The Auror Side-Apparated her to a run-down looking house in the countryside. It looked like it had once been a grand house, but neglect and time had reduced it nearly to ruins. Aurors were swarming around the house, securing a perimeter. Hermione also noted the distinctive white robes of Healers from St. Mungo's on several of the people waiting near the door. Those near the door noted their arrival, and a figure in dark robes rushed forward.

His face soon resolved into the familiar features of Harry, set into hard lines. Hermione privately thought of it as his "game-face."
"Harry, what's going on?" Hermione asked, walking with him back towards the doors.

"We received an owl this morning from a neighbor who claimed that he'd heard strange noises coming from this house. Two Aurors were sent to investigate and when they looked inside, they immediately called for backup." His tone was grim, and Hermione grew worried.

"Harry, what's inside?"

He ran his fingers through his already-disheveled hair. "Come on, I'll show you."

Harry led her inside, two Aurors following them. The inside of the house was as decrepit as the outside, and very little light penetrated the gloom that seemed to hang in the air. He led her up two flights of stairs and down a long corridor. Hermione noted that the banister was shiny, and that they weren't kicking up any dust from the thick carpets as they walked, despite the cobwebs that hung in the corners.

"The place was meant to look abandoned," Harry explained as they walked, "but the kitchen was well-used and there's a bedroom on the first floor that was perfectly clean and clearly lived in."

They stopped near the end of the corridor, between two facing doors. Both looked as if they were opened regularly, because the handles were clean, and no cobwebs had gathered in the corners.

Harry turned to face her. "We called the Healers, but they haven't been allowed up yet. We don't want to move him, and we wanted you to take a look first, to confirm."

Confirm what? But Hermione knew her question would be answered momentarily.

Harry gave her a last look before pushing open the door to the left. Inside was clean, the room filled with light from a window which had clearly been enchanted, because it showed a bright blue sky and it was overcast outside. There was no furniture besides a large bed and a wardrobe. A mirror hung on the wall opposite the bed.

They walked quietly toward the bed, the two Aurors staying in the doorway. Hermione looked down at the figure lying on the bed. A beak took up most of the pale face, the only visible part of the body, which was topped by white-blond hair, two wings were partially extended behind the shoulders, and Hermione was sure that if she could see the hands and feet, both of which were currently under the bedcovers, that they would be clawed. With a sinking feeling in her stomach, she knew exactly what lay on the bed.

Hermione nodded at Harry and gestured toward the door. They walked back out into the hallway, and Harry quietly closed the door.

“He’s a Veela,” she said.

“That’s what we thought. Wait, he?” Harry frowned.

“Yes…” Hermione began.

“I thought there were no male Veela,” one of the other Aurors interjected.

“They’re rare, not non-existent,” Hermione said. “I’m assuming you didn’t check the human parts?”

“We didn’t want to risk disturbing…him. The only thing we’ve done is release the magical bindings that were on him when we arrived,” Harry said. “How do you know he’s male?”
Hermione frowned at this news, but answered, “Female Veela only have white wings. Male Veela have wings ranging from silver to black.”

“Are males always so bird-like?” Harry asked.

Hermione shook her head. “They look like humans most of the time, just like females. Veela only transform, partially or completely, when stressed.”

“So how do we get him to transform back to human? And wake up?”

Hermione frowned thoughtfully. “I’m not sure he’s asleep. He could be unconscious from stress or trauma – his mind could be protecting itself – or he could be injured, or he could just be ignoring us.”

“And how do we determine that?” one of the other Aurors asked.

“The Healers could run a very simple diagnostic to tell whether he is conscious or not. Any other tests of his health would be more complicated. Veela physiology differs from human physiology. They may only be able to tell if he is injured but not how.”

Harry ran a hand through his hair. “Okay. Peters,” he said, addressing one of the Aurors, “you go get a Healer.”

“What about transformation?”

“Veela transform when they are stressed. A partial transformation can be done consciously or unconsciously. Based on the fact that you found him bound in an abandoned-looking house in the middle of nowhere, I’d say it was an unconscious transformation. A full transformation can only be done with effort and is always intentional,” Hermione said, falling easily into what Harry thought of as her “lecture-mode.”

Harry rubbed his temple. “So until he wakes up, or stops ignoring us, he won’t or can’t transform back.”

“And you won’t be able to figure out who he is,” Hermione added, finishing his thought.

“Great,” Harry sighed. “So we have an unknown, stressed-out male Veela who has experienced unknown trauma.”

Hermione nodded sadly. “That’s about right.” She glanced around the hallway and saw the other clean door. “What’s in there?”

“Just a bathroom. As far as we can tell, the only people living here were the Veela and the man living in the bedroom downstairs,” Harry replied.

Hermione growled. “Did you catch him?”

“Yeah. He’s been in holding since this morning, but he won’t say anything.”

The arrival of Peters with a Healer ended the conversation.

“So, who is the patient?” the Healer asked.

“We’re not sure,” Harry said.

“A better question would be what,” Peters muttered quietly.
Harry frowned at him but didn’t say anything.

The Healer looked at the door, at Harry, and then at Hermione. “*What* is the patient?”

It was Hermione who answered. “He’s a Veela.”

The Healer’s eyebrows flew up. “A male Veela?”

Harry nodded. “And he’s…unresponsive. We need you to run a basic diagnostic to determine mental awareness and to determine if he’s injured in any way.”

The Healer frowned. “I can run some diagnostic spells, but I’m not sure how accurate they’ll be.”

“That’s fine. Do what you can,” Harry said, opening the door.

The three of them, Harry, Hermione, and the Healer, walked to the bed. The Veela lay there in the same position as before. Only the movement of his chest indicated that he wasn’t dead. The Healer pulled out his wand and flicked it. Glowing threads appeared over the Veela, and the Healer considered them. He moved his wand, manipulating the threads. Harry and Hermione waited patiently. Hermione watched the Veela, noting that his eyes didn’t even flicker beneath his closed eyelids.

Finally the Healer waved his wand to banish the threads. He turned to them, keeping his voice down as he informed them of the results. “He appears to be in relatively good health. The diagnostic didn’t indicate any injuries, and there is no recent spell residue, which suggests that no spells have been cast recently on or by him.”

“And will he wake up soon?” Harry asked.

The Healer held up his hands helplessly. “I found nothing which would be keeping him unconscious. He will wake in his own time.”

“Could we cast a Renervate?”

The Healer shrugged. “You could, although I’m not certain what effect it would have on a Veela.”

“Would it hurt him?” Harry pressed.

The Healer shook his head. “No. You are free to try.”

Hermione put her hand on Harry’s arm when he raised his wand. “You might want to take him somewhere else before you attempt to wake him. If this environment stressed him enough to cause a transformation – and we don’t know why he transformed yet – then it might be wise to move him to a neutral environment before waking him if you want him to transform back.”

Harry nodded and gave a quick swish-and-flick with his wand. The figure on the bed rose, the covers falling away. As Hermione had suspected, his fingernails and toenails were claws. He wore a simple pair of pants and a long-sleeved shirt, his feet bare. Harry carefully levitated the Veela through the door and out into the hallway. The two Aurors moved out of the way, their faces betraying only mild surprise at seeing a floating body. *They’ve probably seen much stranger things.*

Hermione followed as their odd little group walked down the stairs, Harry carefully keeping the Veela level. The Aurors and Healers waiting in the entry hall stared and Hermione knew that they must have made a strange picture.
When they got outside, Harry turned to her. “We’ll have to Apparate.”

“Where are you taking him?” Hermione asked.

“There’s a Ministry safe house not too far from here. It should be a neutral environment, no matter who he turns out to be,” Harry said wryly. “I’d like if you came along.”

Hermione tilted her head, considering, before she nodded. “I suppose.” She knew that Harry would likely need her expertise when the Veela woke up.

“Right, I’ll have to Side-Along you and him. Take his arm,” Harry ordered. Harry kept him aloft as he took a firm grip on the Veela’s left arm.

Hermione took a grip on the Veela’s right arm, feeling a strange tingle as she did so. She looked down in surprise, noting a quick flicker of the Veela’s eyes beneath his lids.

Her last thought before the pull of Apparition was, Well, I certainly can’t resign now.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think!
As his insides settled from being squeezed by Apparition, Harry looked around the safe house, checking to make sure it was empty. He gently settled the Veela on the bed and then cast a nonverbal *Hominem Revelio* and was satisfied when it revealed that there was no one else in the apartment. Out of the corner of his eye, he watched as Hermione steadied herself.

The safe house looked like a muggle hotel room – bland and generic. The walls were painted off-white and a few abstract pieces of art gave the place enough life to seem less like a prison cell. In addition to the bed, there was a dresser, and a seating area with two chairs on either side of a low table. A door on the same wall as the bed led to a bathroom. It looked like all of the other Ministry safe houses Harry had ever seen.

Hermione took a seat in one of the chairs in the seating area and Harry leaned against the back of the other.

“What now?” she asked, glancing at the unconscious Veela.

“Now we try to wake him,” Harry said. He walked to the side of the bed. “*Renervate,*” he said firmly, pointing his wand at the Veela.

Hermione watched from her seat, for which Harry was grateful. If the Veela woke upset or angry, he didn’t want her in danger, either from the Veela or from himself if he had to prevent the Veela from attacking.

At first nothing happened, but then a soft shushing sound filled the room. Harry realized that it was the sound of the wings flexing and the feathers rustling. He took a step back as the wings flexed, one of them brushing the nearby wall. The wings were bright silver, fading into dark grey near the tips and outer edges. The Veela sat up slowly and blinked, clicking his beak. He looked like he was waking from a deep sleep. All at once he seemed to take in Harry, standing near the foot of the bed, and Hermione sitting across the room.
The Veela leaped to his feet atop the bed, his head just shy of the ceiling and the upper curve of his wings brushing the ceiling. Harry took another step away, sliding his wand into his wrist sheath as he did so to avoid startling the Veela.

The Veela scanned the room, eyes flicking this way and that. After a tense minute, he apparently decided that neither he nor Hermione were a threat and folded his wings along his spine. Harry slowly lowered his hands and took a step forward. He felt Hermione come up behind him.

“I don’t think he thinks we’re a threat,” she said softly, confirming his thought.

“I agree,” he murmured. “What do you suggest we do to encourage him to transform back to human?”

“I think we should talk to him – reassure him.” Hermione had moved up next to him and he inwardly cursed, wishing she would stay behind him, safe.

She took another step forward, and Harry put a hand on her shoulder to stop her progress. When she looked back at him in confusion, he gave a minute shake of his head.

She shrugged and then looked back at the Veela. “Hello there,” she said. “My name is Hermione. This is Harry. You’re safe here. If you could transform back so we could talk, that would be really helpful.”

Harry wanted to simultaneously roll his eyes and smile. Hermione had spoken so sweetly, like she was coaxing an animal out of hiding instead of placating a stressed, partially-transformed Veela who was definitely more dangerous than they were.

The Veela considered her, clacking its beak and rustling its wings. It tilted its head back and forth as if to say, how?

“You just need to focus on who you are – the human, not the Veela,” she said encouragingly. “Think about your parents, or your friends,” she suggested. “Maybe your girlfriend, if you have one?”

The Veela seemed to grow upset at the last comment, standing up straighter and flexing its wings.

“Or not a girlfriend. Boyfriend? Lover?” Hermione seemed to be struggling. “Mate?” she said finally.

The Veela seemed to settle. He looked at them for a moment longer before his wings returned to their position tucked against his shoulders. Finally he seemed to focus on something beyond them. Harry waited, tense. He subtly unsheathed his wand. There was no telling who the Veela was; he could be someone dangerous.

Slowly, the beak shrank into a mouth and nose, and the claws shrank back into nails. The wings stayed as they were. When the transformation had finished, a familiar face had replaced the Veela. A very familiar face.

“Malfoy?” Harry exclaimed.

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Harry knew he was gaping, but of all the people that Harry considered the Veela could have been, Malfoy hadn’t even been on the list.
“You’re a Veela?” Harry sputtered.

“It makes sense, really,” Hermione said calmly. “The hair, for one thing. It’s so much like Fleur’s.”

Malfoy stared at them for a moment, before elegantly descending from the bed. “Potter, Granger,” he sneered. He glanced around. “Where am I?”

Harry stared at him for a moment longer before realizing that he was waiting for a reply. “A Ministry safe house.”

“And why am I…here?” he asked, managing to infuse the word with all the disdain that was written on his face.

“We were trying to provide a neutral environment to encourage your transformation,” Hermione said matter-of-factly. “Apparently, it worked.”

Malfoy looked at her. “No shit, Granger.”

Harry ran a hand through his hair. “Look, Malfoy, now that you’re…you, again, I have some questions I have to ask you.”

Malfoy crossed his arms. “Take it up with my lawyer, Potter.”

Harry gave in to the urge to roll his eyes. Not even human for a minute and he was back to being a prat. He was nicer as an unconscious Veela. “Not those kinds of questions, Malfoy. I just want to know how you ended up in that house and I need a statement about what happened to you.”

Malfoy raised one pale brow. “No.”

Harry gripped his wand tighter before forcing himself to release the tension, lowering his shoulders and blowing out a breath discreetly. “That wasn’t a request, Malfoy. This is an official investigation, and you have to provide a statement.”

“I repeat, take it up with my lawyer,” Malfoy replied, inspecting the nails of one hand.

“Please, Malfoy?” That was Hermione. She had stepped back to stand next to him, and she was looking at Malfoy with those same beseeching eyes that had managed to convince Harry to replace the glasses he’d had since he was eleven.

Malfoy sighed. “I don’t know what’s so complicated. If you want answers, you’ll have to contact my lawyer. Now, I’ll be going once you return my wand.” He held out an imperious hand.

Harry shook his head. “We don’t have it. It wasn’t anywhere within the house where we found you.”

Malfoy sneered. “Then find it.”

“That might be easier to do if you told us what happened!” Harry snapped.

Hermione laid a gentle hand on his arm. “He does have rights, Harry. And a lawyer is one of them.”

Malfoy glared at Hermione’s hand before moving his glare up to Hermione’s face where it transformed into the sneer Harry remembered from Hogwarts. “Ah yes, I’d forgotten that you were the Ministry’s beast-wrangler. What an illustrious position.”

Hermione didn’t take the bait. “You seem to be forgetting that you are one of those beasts, Malfoy.”
“I am not a beast,” Malfoy snarled.

“Your words, not mine,” Hermione said primly, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear.

Harry wanted to grin, but tried to maintain an air of professionalism.

Malfoy turned his attention to Harry, apparently deciding to drop the argument with Hermione. “How long are you going to hold me here, Potter?”

Harry raised his eyebrows. “You’re not being held, Malfoy. We brought you here to help you transform.” He looked Malfoy up and down, and couldn’t help but note that he was lean and fit. And those wings are spectacular. “Now that you have, and we know who you are, you’re free to go.”

“Good,” Malfoy said, nose in the air. Harry waited to see how long it took him to remember that he didn’t have a wand and therefore couldn’t Apparate.

“If you need any help or advice, my office is always open. You don’t even have to talk to me. But we help many…”

“I don’t need help, Granger. Or your charity, either,” Malfoy interrupted.

“It’s not charity,” Hermione sniffed. “It’s my job.”

Malfoy scoffed.

They all stood in awkward silence for a moment.

Finally, Malfoy looked at Harry. “I will need some assistance,” he practically choked on the word, “to get home. Since those imbeciles you call Aurors couldn’t find my wand.”

“If you want help, you might try asking more nicely,” Harry said.

Hermione nudged him with her elbow, giving him a disapproving look out of the corner of her eye.

Harry rolled his eyes and held out his arm. “I’ll Side-Along you. Where do you want to go?”

Malfoy glanced around. “Is there no Floo?”

“Ministry policy – no Floos in safe houses.”

With visible reluctance, Malfoy took hold of Harry’s arm. “The Manor, then. You’ve been there, as I recall.”

Harry looked at him calmly, knowing that Malfoy was just trying to rile him up. “Yes. I remember.” He looked at Hermione, noting with concern that the mention of the Manor had caused her to pale slightly. “Can you get home okay?”

Hermione smiled at him, some color returning to her face. “Of course. I’ll still see you this weekend, right?”

Harry nodded. “Yep.” He turned his attention to Malfoy, who looked like he was gritting his teeth. “Ready?”

Malfoy only sneered.
After an exhausting week chasing after Malfoy and having infuriating conversations with the Malfoy’s lawyer, Harry was more than ready for a couple days off.

On Sunday at a few minutes after noon, Harry Apparated to a small house in the middle of the wilds of Dartmoor. He knocked on the door, admiring the unique plants which formed what could have been a garden in front of the house. A short, petite blonde girl answered the door.

“Harry!” Luna cried. “How lovely to see you.”

Harry smiled and walked in as Luna stepped aside to let him past. “How are you, Luna?”

“Well, all of the wrackspurts have flown east for the season and the dirigible pear is beginning to blossom,” she said brightly.

“That’s great, Luna.” He followed her into the kitchen, where Hermione was already sitting at the slightly battered table, sipping a cup of tea. “Hi, Hermione.”

Hermione smiled. “Hello, Harry. How was the rest of your week?” she asked as he took a seat next to her.

Luna put the kettle on and then sat in the third chair at the table.

“It was much less exciting, although much more frustrating.” He ran a hand through his hair. Hermione smirked at him and he knew that the strands were probably sticking up.

“Has Malfoy come in to talk about the investigation?” she asked.

“Of course not,” Harry sighed. “He sent his lawyer in the next day and he’s been stonewalling. Won’t let me anywhere near Malfoy. He says it would ‘violate his client’s rights.’”

“Is that true?” Luna asked.

“No, as part of an active investigation, he has to give a statement,” Harry said. “He just wants to see how long he can drag this out, probably.”

“If it helps, I know for a fact that legislation went through a couple years ago that all magical creatures with wizard intelligence and/or consciousness are subject to the same legal process as wizards,” Hermione added.

Harry scratched his chin. “Maybe. Malfoy hasn’t tried the Veela angle yet, but if he does then I can use that.”

“Malfoy is a Veela?” Luna asked.

Harry blushed. “You aren’t technically supposed to know that, because it’s not public record yet, but yes.”

Luna nodded thoughtfully. “It makes sense. I’m surprised we didn’t see it before.”

The kettle whistled and Luna stood to make a cup of tea for her and Harry.

“It does?” Harry asked, perplexed.

“Well, he does have all the features,” Hermione said. “And didn’t you say he was looking for some sort of magical creature liaison?”
Harry frowned. “I did, but I certainly didn’t realize it had anything to do with him personally. I didn’t even know he was a Veela until this week.”

“It may not be related to him being a Veela. He really does look like one, though,” Hermione said thoughtfully, her chin in her hand. “He could be Fleur’s cousin.”

“That’s true,” Luna said, putting a cup in front of him, “But I was thinking of his sexual reputation.”

Harry choked on his sip of tea. “I beg your pardon?”

“He was well known at school for his popularity as a sexual partner,” Luna stated serenely, taking a sip of her tea.

“I don’t recall that,” Harry managed to choke out. *That wasn’t entirely true.*

“I’m surprised. You spent so much time studying him and you didn’t hear the gossip?” Luna asked.

“That wasn’t the kind of gossip I was interested in,” Harry said. *Not true.* “Surely you didn’t know about this Hermione?”

Hermione’s cheeks turned pink. “He was the subject of rather a lot of conversation in the girls’ dorm.”

“Merlin, please, no more.” Harry shook his head to clear out the images of Malfoy in bed. And of Hermione talking about Malfoy in bed. While in bed. *Stop that!*

“It’s really not unusual to have sexual partners of different genders in the wizarding world, Harry,” Luna said. “I didn’t think you would find it strange.”

Harry avoided making eye contact. “I have no idea why you’d think that I would or wouldn’t find it strange.”

Luna hmm’d. “As you say. Your head is full of nargles, you know.”

“Of course, Luna.” Harry buried his discomfort in a large gulp of tea.

Thankfully, the conversation moved in different directions after that. Hermione told Luna about eventually resigning from the Department of Magical Creatures.

Luna tilted her head. “I think you’ll find something new to do soon.”

Hermione laughed. “I hope so! I hate being bored. And I hate doing paperwork.”

Luna smiled dreamily. “I don’t think that will be a problem.”

“Well, I can’t resign yet anyway. I have to finish up Malfoy’s case. Since he is a Veela, part of the paperwork falls to me. And I can’t finish my paperwork until the Auror’s investigation wraps up.” Hermione mockingly glared at Harry.

Harry put up his hands. “Blame Malfoy, not me!”

“I can blame both of you,” Hermione said smugly.

Luna nodded sagely. “Yes, your threads are intertwined.”
Harry frowned. “What does that mean?”

Instead of explaining, Luna said, “I think the gnomes have gotten into the radishes again.” She made no move to get up and check.

Harry sighed. Luna wouldn’t explain even if it did mean something more than just something about the case. He looked down at his watch and his empty cup.

“I have to go,” he said regretfully.

Hermione looked at her own watch. “I do as well. Crookshanks will be getting anxious to be fed.”

Harry snorted. “That cat is a menace.”

“He is not!”

“Is. I’ll see you later.” He stood and the other two did as well. “Luna, it was lovely to see you as always.” He gave her a hug.

“Mind the threads, Harry,” she said.

“I will,” he promised, knowing it was easier to agree than debate.

“Luna, we’ll get together for lunch sometime this week. Ginny gets back on Tuesday, and I know she’d love to see you,” Hermione said, giving Luna a hug.

Luna nodded happily. “It was so nice to see you both.” She walked them to the front door.

Harry and Hermione waved goodbye and then Disapparated back to their respective homes.

*****

When he got into work on Monday, Harry was surprised to find a response from his latest letter to Malfoy waiting on his desk. He hadn’t expected a reply so soon – he’d sent it off on Friday afternoon before leaving work. He thought Malfoy would put off responding until the middle of the week. He sat at his desk and opened the letter.

Potter,

My lawyer informs me that I have until Friday to provide the Aurors with a statement about the events of last week. I will be there at precisely ten o’clock in the morning on Monday, and I will speak to you. Alone. I will be leaving at precisely eleven o’clock.

Malfoy

Harry grinned. His letter to Malfoy had included an Order of Compliance signed by Robards, the Head Auror, and Kingsley. It appeared that not even the Malfoys were willing to navigate the notoriously bureaucratic and labyrinthine system of appeals necessary to overturn an Order of Compliance. They were issued rarely and the laws surrounding them were incredibly rigid. The only reason Robards and Kingsley had agreed to sign off was the clear necessity of Malfoy’s statement in the case.

Harry worked through some of the paperwork for the case while he waited for ten o’clock to roll around. The last form he filled out at a few minutes to ten was the Return of Evidence. After a thorough check of the house, Malfoy’s wand had turned up in a hidden compartment beneath the floorboards in a locked and warded room on the first floor. He would give it to Malfoy first thing
when he arrived. *Maybe then he’ll loosen up.* Harry snorted. Unlikely.

As his watch ticked to ten, Malfoy appeared in the doorway of his office; Harry had left the door open purposely. He shared the office with Renault, another Auror, but Harry had asked to have the office while interviewing Malfoy and Renault had been more than eager to take an extra break for an hour.

Harry stood. “Malfoy,” he greeted shortly.

“Potter.” He strolled into the office. He wore a black suit beneath a set of immaculate black robes. His wings were folded along his spine and were set off surprisingly well against the severe black of his robes. He took a seat in front of Harry’s desk, spreading his wings slightly as he did so. “You have one hour.”

Harry sat as well, trying to keep from staring. “So you said.” Opening a drawer, he pulled out Malfoy’s wand and then held it out. “But first, I believe this is yours.”

Malfoy took it gently. He looked at it with a gaze that was nearly reverent. “Thank you,” he said softly, and the seemed to recover himself. “It appears your Aurors are only mostly incompetent.”

Harry smiled slightly. “Yes.” He selected a fresh piece of parchment from the mass of papers on his desk and a quill from the stand. “And now, if you would please provide your account of the events surrounding your capture and imprisonment.”

Harry waited, his quill poised over the parchment.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry/not sorry for the cliffhanger. Next up: Draco!

Let me know your thoughts!
Draco absolutely refused to think about it. Or him. Or her.

Ah! Thanks to everyone who read/commented/left kudos. You made my week! I updated Chapters 1 and 2 with some edits and a bit more dialogue in some places to clear up things that didn't quite make sense when I read them through again.

Anyway, hope you enjoy!

Here's Draco...

Draco stared at Potter’s pen, wishing it would catch fire so that he wouldn’t have to answer his question. Unfortunately, there was an entire stand of quills to take its place. Potter might notice something afoot if all of the quills in his office spontaneously combusted. Even he isn’t that thick.

He cleared his throat, annoyed that Potter just stared at him, waiting patiently. “This is strictly confidential. If so much as a word appears in the press, I’ll have your head on a chopping block.”

Potter frowned at him and Draco had the insane urge to smooth the wrinkle that appeared between his brows. “Don’t insult me, Malfoy.”

Draco scoffed. “The Prophet seems to have an inside track. I’m just making sure that my confidential statement doesn’t get leaked.”

Potter raised an eyebrow. “You never thought that perhaps the Ministry leaked certain stories to the Prophet to keep them distracted?”

Malfoy sneered. “I would never give the Ministry that much credit. Especially not one run by a Hufflepuff.”

Harry rolled his eyes. Draco noticed that he did that a lot. “Oh please, Malfoy. Haven’t we all moved past House affiliation?”

Draco resisted the urge to scoff. “Naturally, Potter.”

“Glad to hear it. Your statement?” Potter waved his quill.

Draco cleared his throat again. “Yes. Well, three weeks ago I was returning home from a friend’s house…”

“Which friend?” Potter interrupted.
Draco glared. “Blaise Zabini.”

“To which house were you going? And why not Floo?”

Draco nearly groaned. At this rate, he’d have to stay past eleven o’clock, and miss a meeting –that he hadn’t planned to attend anyway, if he were being honest with himself – or come back another day. “I was going back to my London apartment. And I prefer Apparition to the Floo.”

Potter nodded and noted some things down. “Very well. Continue.”

“Thank you for your permission, Potter,” Draco sneered. “As I was saying, I was returning home and as I was walking to the Apparition point, which was about three blocks away, I was accosted. A Body-Bind hex caught me by surprise. The man then Stunned me before Apparating me to the house you found me in.”

“Did you recognize him?” Potter asked.

“No,” Draco replied.

“Describe him.”

“Short, maybe a couple inches shorter than you. Light brown hair, brown eyes. Pale.”

Potter nodded and made a few more notes. Draco resisted the urge to grab the quill and break it.

“Go on,” Potter prompted when Draco remained silent for longer than necessary.

“Right. He took me back to the house and put me up in that room you found me in. He then used various curses and hexes to instigate a transformation.” Draco suppressed a shudder at the memory. It had been a hellish few days.

“Did he use any Unforgiveables?”

“No. He stuck to some of the nastier legal curses.” Draco had to give the man credit for creativity.

“Hmm. Unfortunate,” Potter muttered.

“Excuse me?” Draco exclaimed. “Still holding grudges, Potter? I would have expected better of an Auror.” It hurt more than Draco cared to admit that Potter still hated him after all these years. Yes, that’s the reason it hurts.

Potter ran his free hand through his hair. “I didn’t mean it like that.”

Draco snorted.

Potter fixed him with a look. “I’m serious. I was only thinking that if he had used an Unforgiveable, he could get a much longer sentence.”

“Oh.” Draco felt something vaguely warm in the region of his heart. He’s protective of me! No, he’s just doing his job. He’s an Auror. He protects everyone. And I don’t need him to protect me.

A hint of a smile flickered across Potter’s face. “Despite past evidence, I don’t hate you, Malfoy. Now, he was trying to initiate a transformation into a Veela?” Potter’s voice had reverted to professional, and Draco appreciated that he didn’t sound pitying or disgusted.

Draco nodded sharply.
“Were you aware that you were a Veela?”

Draco hesitated. Blood was still a sensitive topic, even after all these years. “No,” he finally admitted. “Veela characteristics often lay dormant if a person is less than half Veela.”

“Did you know you had Veela blood?” Potter asked.

Draco reluctantly admired Potter’s ability to see to the heart of the matter. “Yes. It comes from both sides of my family. I was therefore…less surprised than I could have been when he succeeded in triggering a partial transformation.”

Potter nodded. Draco was more grateful than he expected that Potter didn’t say anything about the obvious hypocrisy of his and his family’s former beliefs.

“So you transformed due to mental and physical stress.” It wasn’t a question. “That was what Hermione theorized.”

Bloody Granger. Involved in everything.

“Yes. It took about a week. He forced nutritive potions down my throat once a day, from what I could tell. Once I’d transformed, he didn’t come back for a couple days. He’d constructed wards that allowed me to move between the bed, the wardrobe, and the bathroom across the hall. If I tried to move elsewhere, the backlash was unpleasant. He’d taken my wand the first night, and the wards were far too strong to be broken wandlessly.” Draco grimaced, remembering the boredom and fear.

“Eventually, he came back. He Stunned me again before using magical bindings to keep me still and then took some blood and hair. He did that for at least another week. He came back every day until the Aurors showed up. By then, I had mostly shut down. I was healthy physically, thanks to nutritive and Blood-Replenishing potions, but mentally I…disassociated.” Draco forced himself to stop talking, aware that he was heading into territory past strictly necessary information.

“And that’s how we found you,” Potter concluded. “That explains why the diagnostic revealed no recent spells cast on or by you.”

“Yes, he was quite careful about that after I transformed.”

“Did he say anything to you when he was taking those samples? Anything to indicate what he was doing?”

Draco grimaced. “Unfortunately. He seemed to want someone to talk to. And he seemed to have this idea in his head that he could somehow persuade me to help him if he explained what he was doing.”

Blathering idiot. “He had fallen in love with a Veela, who rejected him, naturally, and he somehow got the notion that if he made himself into a Veela that she’d love him.”

Potter stared at him. “He was trying to make himself a Veela? Is that even possible?”

Draco sneered. “Of course not, Potter. But the idiot thought it was. He’d found some ritual in an old spell book that he thought could do it. Obviously he didn’t succeed.”

“Obviously,” Potter murmured.

Draco narrowed his eyes. “What is that look, Potter?”

Potter shook his head. “Nothing. Is there anything else you’d like to add?”
I’d like to snog you. Wait, what? “No,” Draco snapped, unnerved at the thought in his head.

Potter gave him a strange look, but nodded anyway. “Right. Well, with your statement we should be able to finish the investigation. The man who was holding you will stand trial and then probably be sentenced to Azkaban. If we need any clarification or any further information, I’ll owl you.”

“Fine. Is that all for now?” Draco asked, impatient to get out of there. The longer he spent in the room, the itchier he felt and the more anxious he got. He could smell Potter and it was distinctly… pleasant. What the fuck?

“Yes, thank you. But you will be required to attend the trial and testify as a witness.” Potter stood, offering his hand. “You’ll get an owl with a court date.”

Draco stood, rather more clumsily than normal. He still wasn’t quite used to the extra weight of his wings. “Right. Good.” He grasped Potter’s hand. A shock ran up his arm. From Potter’s face, he’d felt it too.

Potter released his hand quickly. “What was that?”

“No idea. Goodbye, Potter.” Draco rushed out of the room, clutching his wand and desperately trying not to think about the shock. He was sure it was a figment of his imagination. It has to be.

*****

Once to the Ministry’s Apparition chamber, Draco Apparated to the Manor, where he’d been staying since being freed. His mother had been terrified when he disappeared, and he’d opted to stay for a while to ease her mind. He didn’t really mind living at the Manor again – his mother had extensively redecorated and renovated after the war and it felt like an entirely different building.

He Apparated into the front hall, alerting the house elves, one of whom immediately appeared.

“Master Draco, welcome home.”

“Thank you, Pipsy,” Draco said, handing over his traveling cloak. “Would you tell my mother that I’ve returned?”

“Of course, Master Draco,” Pipsy said. “Does Master need anything else?”

“Tea in the Blue Parlor, please. Inform my mother of that as well,” Draco requested.

“Yes, Master Draco.” With a snap, Pipsy Disapparated.

Draco slowly walked to the Blue Parlor, one of the new rooms that had been created when his mother gutted the East Wing. Neither she nor Draco had been able to set foot there until after it had been completely finished. Too many bad memories had lingered in the dark corners and thick carpets.

Tea had already been laid out when he entered, and Draco took a seat on the pale blue low-backed sofa. The design allowed him to spread his wings out behind him without having to flare them awkwardly to either side. The fact that his mother had purchased such a sofa made him wonder about a number of things related to his heritage.

While he waited for his mother to arrive, he poured a cup for her and himself, and by the time she came in, dressed in pale green robes that perfectly accented the couch she sat on, he had doctored them to their respective tastes.
“Draco, dear, how are you?” she said, taking the most excruciatingly polite sip of tea.

“I’m well, Mother.” Draco held his cup, savoring the warmth the delicate china imparted.

“How was your meeting this morning?”

“It was fine.”

“Did you get this awful business sorted out? I do so hate to leave things unresolved.” She took another tiny sip.

Draco shrugged slightly. “It should be resolved very soon. Potter said that they had all the evidence they needed.”

“If that awful man doesn’t get at least a decade in Azkaban, I will take it up with the Minister.”

Draco knew she would do no such thing. They hadn’t had that kind of standing since the war ended, but he appreciated the thought. “I’m sure Potter will see to it.”

His mother gave a tiny hum that could have meant she was horribly upset or that she was terribly pleased. “Ah yes. Mister Potter. Is he the lead Auror on this investigation?”

Draco nodded, taking a sip of his tea.

His mother sighed. “Well, I suppose he’ll be fair. He has quite the reputation.”

“I’m sure I don’t know.” Draco said evasively. Of course, that was a lie. He’d done research into Potter almost immediately and discovered that he had an exemplary record as an Auror and was fast on his way to becoming Deputy Head Auror in the next couple years.

“Do you still dislike him, Draco? Really, after all these years that’s quite disappointing.” His mother gave him a look over the rim of her tea cup.

“I don’t dislike him. I barely know him. We haven’t spoken more than a few times since the war ended.” Which was true. Aside from Ministry balls and other tedious social events where they’d exchanged polite small talk, they’d meticulously avoided one another. Well, Draco had avoided Potter. He wasn’t sure if the reverse were true.

“That’s quite good to hear.” She gave a tiny smile. “Have you seen Daphne, recently?”

Draco didn’t react to the abrupt shift in conversation. “I saw her at Pansy’s luncheon last month. She seemed to be doing well.”

“Such a lovely girl, and her sister as well.” His mother poured herself another cup of tea and topped up his own.

Draco groaned internally. He could see exactly where this was headed. “Yes, I believe Astoria was there as well.”

“They’re coming over for lunch tomorrow; I trust you’ll be able to join us?” His mother smiled sweetly.

“Of course, I’d love to.” I’d rather eat glass.

“Excellent, they’ll be over at eleven. Do be on time, dear. It’s so terribly rude to be late.”
His mother made rebukes into an art form.

“I wouldn’t dream of being late, Mother.”

“Naturally. Now, tell me how things are going with your new abilities.” His mother gestured elegantly at his wings in a way which could never be considered rude.

“They are going quite well. Father has been…helpful in providing information,” he replied. His father had given him a number of books about Veela and diaries of what his father had called “unfortunate” ancestors who had also come into their Veela inheritance.

“Your father is doing his best. You know how he is, he’ll come around.” She fluttered her fingers carelessly. “He simply never expected you to come into your inheritance. I think he thought that after you turned seventeen with no sign of transformation, you never would.”

“He was wrong,” Draco said, a hint of anger coloring his voice.

“Your father was wrong about a great many things,” his mother agreed.

*What an understatement.* Draco set down his empty cup. “Undoubtedly. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m rather tired.”

“Of course, dear.”

His mother remained seated when he stood. He leaned over and gave her a kiss on the cheek. “I’ll see you for lunch tomorrow.”

Since returning to live in the Manor, Draco had taken up residence in his old rooms. The second floor, with most of the living quarters, had been extensively redecorated after the war. He had kept a similar color scheme to what it had been during his Hogwarts days; his room was decorated in shades of deep green and black, with silver and white accents. Living in the dungeon for seven years, he’d gotten used to the dark décor and found it comforting even years later.

When he reached his bedroom, he sprawled on his lavish four-poster. It was ridiculously decadent and he loved it. He stared up at the ceiling, trying not to think about anything at all.

The first night after he’d been…rescued, he’d been anxious about falling asleep, more than a little worried that his dreams would be haunted by the torturous weeks. Instead, he’d been treated to vague but intriguing dreams about figures he couldn’t identify but felt tantalizingly familiar. He’d woken early in the morning, panting and with a hard-on that would not go away. He’d been more than a little embarrassed, even though he’d been alone. He hadn’t reacted that way to a dream since Hogwarts. And he *would not* go there, because he would absolutely *never* admit who he dreamed about.

As he stared at the ceiling, the plain white interrupted by extravagant molding, he replayed the last moments in Potter’s office. The shock had run straight up his arm and then burrowed into place behind his heart. He could still feel it there, a sizzling warmth he didn’t know what to do with. *Probably just some strange interaction between our magics. It’ll probably be gone this time tomorrow.*

He refused to dwell on it any further. He levered himself up and then went into his office next door, determined to get some work done that day. And not to think about Potter. At all.
The next morning, the warmth was not gone, but Draco was determined to ignore it. He walked into the sunroom at exactly eleven o’clock to find his mother, Daphne Greengrass, and her younger sister Astoria seated at the glass-topped table. He kissed his mother on the cheek in greeting and then took a seat between his mother and Daphne, across from Astoria. Beverages had already been laid out, and a house elf appeared to pour him a glass of lemonade from the pitcher on the table.

“Draco, how nice of you to join us,” his mother said sweetly, as though she hadn’t demanded his presence.

“Mother,” he said, nodding. “Daphne, Miss Greengrass, lovely to see you both.” He nodded at both of them, pureblood etiquette rising to the fore.

“Draco, it is so lovely to see you again,” Daphne said, smiling.

“I trust your parents are well?” Draco asked, placing his napkin delicately into his lap.

“Oh yes. Mother and Father have gone off on holiday to Spain. The weather there is quite lovely this time of year.” Daphne smiled at him again.

“And how are you Miss Greengrass?” Draco asked.

“Please, call me Astoria. And I’m quite well.”

“That is good to hear, Astoria.” Draco took a sip of his lemonade.

Daphne stared at his wings. “So, it is true then? You are a…Veela?”

Subtly was apparently lost on the elder Greengrass. “Yes. The transformation is quite recent.”

Daphne practically leered. “That must explain why you were always so popular at school.”

_We slept together once, don’t expect a proposal._ “I’d like to think some of it was natural charm,” he said instead dryly.

“Astoria, dear,” his mother said, interrupting Daphne’s blatant attempt at flattery, “Pansy was telling me the other day that you started volunteering at the new Ministry charity?”

Astoria smiled shyly. “Oh, yes. The children are really quite lovely. A couple of them are starting at Hogwarts this year.”

“How nice,” his mother said.

Draco hid his surprise. He wouldn’t have thought either of the Greengrass sisters would be inclined to charity work, but then, his experience was entirely based on Daphne. He’d barely spoken two words to Astoria during the years they overlapped at Hogwarts. Perhaps she was different from her sister.

“A worthy cause,” his mother said, praise tinting her voice.

“Do you enjoy it?” he asked.

Astoria’s eyes widened. “Oh, yes. The children are really quite lovely. A couple of them are starting at Hogwarts this year.”

“How nice,” his mother said.

Daphne smiled thinly. “Astoria has recently developed a soft spot for those…less fortunate.”
The war changed us. He looked at Daphne’s poorly-disguised disdain. Well, some of us. Draco could easily see that Astoria was intimidated by her older sister, and he couldn’t help but take pity on her. Fortunately, lunch arrived, delivered by house elves, and temporarily distracted everyone at the table.

“I’m sure the orphanage appreciates your help,” he said kindly when everyone had settled in to eat.

Astoria smiled at him. “I really do enjoy working there. I’ve gotten to know the other volunteers quite well,” she said brightly.

“Oh? Anyone we know?” his mother asked.

“I’m not sure,” Astoria said nervously.

Draco would bet money that very few former Slytherins besides Astoria worked at a home for war orphans. Volunteering among purebloods was best done from afar and through judicious donations, not through physical work.

His mother made a dismissive gesture. “I’m sure there is someone?”

“Well, Cho Chang volunteers there,” Astoria offered. “She was in Ravenclaw.”

“I remember her,” Daphne said. “She was obsessed with Potter and Diggory.”

“Ah, yes,” Astoria said nervously. “But she’s married now and she is really very nice.”

“Married?” his mother asked. “To whom?”

“I don’t remember his name,” Astoria said. Her hand shook as she lifted up her glass to take a sip of lemonade.

Probably a half-blood or Muggle-born then. Maybe even a Muggle.

“It doesn’t matter,” his mother said, waving her hand. “Who runs the charity? I don’t recall seeing a name in the papers.”

Astoria bit her lip. “Well, she didn’t want her name in the papers.”

“Her?” Daphne sniffed. “What truly respectable young lady would run a charity?”

“It’s Hermione Granger.”

Of course it’s bloody Granger. He was suddenly assailed by a memory of a soothing voice and wide eyes, but quickly pushed the image away.

“I don’t know why an attention-grabbing Mudblood wouldn’t want her name in the paper,” Daphne sneered.

Astoria looked horrified at Daphne’s comment.

Draco wanted to grab Daphne by the hair and throw her out of the house. Just for her rudeness. Not because she insulted Granger. His respect for Astoria’s sweetness was growing; if Daphne was the example she’d had for manners, it was amazing she had any charm.

His mother looked at Daphne disapprovingly. “Let us not forget, Miss Greengrass, that Miss Granger helped put an end to that awful war.”
Daphne apparently sensed that she’d displeased his mother and dipped her head. “I apologize, Mrs. Malfoy.”

With that, the conversation turned to idle gossip about other pureblood families, and Draco finished his lunch in silence. He had no desire to participate in the conversation, and would have left if he didn’t think his mother would give him a thorough dressing-down later. She was far too polite to ever raise her voice in company.

When Daphne and Astoria finally rose to leave, Draco had never been more relieved. He walked them to the front door.

“Daphne, Astoria, it was lovely to see you both again,” he lied smoothly.

“Draco, it was so wonderful to see you,” Daphne simpered. She held out her hand and Draco raised it to his lips, kissing the back as lightly as possible.

He had to resist the urge to wipe his lips when he released her hand. The brief contact had triggered his gag reflex and the urge to get as far away from her as possible was nearly overwhelming.

He turned to Astoria to hide the disgust he wasn’t sure he’d fully kept from his expression. He mustered a smile. He raised her hand to his lips nervously. She blushed. He brushed a light kiss to the back of her hand, as he’d done with Daphne. Even though he liked her a great deal better than her sister, repulsion welled in his gut again.

“It was lovely speaking with you this afternoon,” he said, managing to keep his voice even, despite the violent urge to push her away. Why is this happening?

“And you, Draco,” she said, smiling up at him.

Even as he looked at her, all he could think of was the fact that her brown hair and blue eyes weren’t right. The hand he wanted to be kissing belonged to someone with curly brown hair and brown eyes. It was Granger’s hand he wanted to be kissing. I’d like to kiss something else of hers. No! No, I wouldn’t!

The direction of his thoughts shook him, and he was barely able to finish seeing them off before he was rushing upstairs into a very, very cold shower.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter turned out to be a bit longer than I expected, but I just had so much fun writing Draco’s internal monologue.

Let me know what you think!
Hermione really wasn't sure how she got talked into this.

So, I'll almost certainly be updating closer to once a week now. Life is starting to get busy again, but I'll really try to post a chapter at least once a week. I'm not sure how long this will be yet, but at least ten chapters and probably more. I love all your comments and a huge thank you to everyone who followed this story!

This chapter we get lots of Ginny, because I love her character and once I started I just couldn't stop.

So here's Hermione...

Hermione looked up when the bell over the door jingled. After checking the last seven times the door had opened, this time it was finally the person she was looking for.

“Ginny!” She waved a hand to get the redhead’s attention.

Ginny looked over and smiled broadly when she caught sight of Hermione and Luna sitting at the corner table. She hurried over, paying no attention when her overly-large purse hit the shoulder of an older woman sitting at a table between the door and Hermione’s table.

“Ginny! Apologize,” Hermione scolded.

Ginny turned back to look at the disgruntled woman. “Sorry!”

The woman harrumphed before turning back to her companion.

“Girls! So amazing to see you again.” Ginny grinned, plopping into the third seat at the table.

“How are you, Ginny?” Luna asked, her soft voice a stark contrast to Ginny’s exuberance.

“Bloody brilliant. This season was fantastic.” Ginny couldn’t seem to stop grinning.

Hermione smiled. Ginny had gotten back from her season with the Holyhead Harpies on Tuesday, but they hadn’t been able to meet until Friday. Whenever Ginny was off-season, Hermione, Luna, and Ginny would meet regularly for lunch and, because it was Ginny, gossip. “I read that you guys finished well in the league.”

“Third! Best since I started playing for them.”
“That’s wonderful,” Luna said. “That explains the billywigs.”

Ginny laughed. “I imagine. So! I feel like it’s been forever since I’ve seen you girls. Tell me everything that’s been going on.” She leaned her elbow on the table and cupped her chin with her hand.

“The dirigible plum has started blooming,” Luna said brightly.

“Oh? Are you going to make more earrings?” Hermione asked.

Luna nodded. “Oh yes. Last year’s have dried out and once that happens they must be replaced.”

“Why’s that?” Ginny asked, taking a sip of the tea Hermione had ordered for her.

“They start to make you think about ordinary things, instead of extraordinary,” Luna replied seriously.

“Oh, well then I suppose that makes sense,” Hermione said doubtfully. She’d never quite been able to follow Luna’s thoughts.

“Don’t worry, Hermione,” Luna said, patting her hand, “I’ll make you a pair. I’m sure you’ll need them.”

Hermione frowned. “For what?”

“If I told you, you’d only twist the threads,” Luna replied.

“What threads?” Why couldn’t she just explain things rationally?

Ginny waved a hand. “Never mind that. You know she won’t tell you anyway. What’s new with you?”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Not much. I think I might resign from the DMC.”

“You define that as not much?” she exclaimed.

“Well I haven’t resigned yet,” Hermione defended.

“Hmph. Why?”

“Why haven’t I resigned yet or why am I resigning?” Hermione asked, just to be prickly.

“Both.” Ginny smirked at her.

Hermione rolled her eyes again. “Because I’m waiting for a good time, and because I’m not satisfied there anymore.”

“You’re spending too much time with Harry, he rolls his eyes too much too,” Ginny pointed out.

Hermione coughed to hide her blush.

“Why aren’t you satisfied?” Ginny asked, apparently deciding to overlook teasing her about her embarrassment in favor of answers.

Hermione shrugged uncomfortably. “I don’t know. I just feel like something’s missing in my life lately. There’s nothing left for me at the Ministry. I’m just loaded down with paperwork all the time.”
That’s all I ever do anymore, even on weekends. It’s not what I’d imagined when I started.” She blew out a breath, moving a strand of hair off her face.

Luna nodded sagely. “Your head is full of wrackspurts.”

Ginny examined her with narrowed eyes. “You do seem a bit peaky. Are you getting enough to eat?”

“Yes, Mrs. Weasley.” Hermione just barely resisted the urge to roll her eyes again. “Harry makes sure of it.”

Ginny glared at her and then smiled slyly. “Does he?” Ginny asked.

“Yes. I mean no! No! Not like that! I mean, we eat lunch together often. We have the same lunch hour. And we like to eat at the same café.” Hermione knew she was babbling and promptly shut up.

Ginny grinned and waved a hand carelessly. “No worries, darling. I moved on from Harry years ago. Got my own man now. But you seem a little too defensive. Is something happening between you?”

“Their threads are intertwined,” Luna told Ginny, as if imparting a great truth.

Great, now Luna was encouraging Ginny and Ginny would never believe that nothing was happening. And nothing was happening. Nothing at all. Even if she did think he had very nice, broad shoulders. He looked strong everywhere, in fact. He could probably pick her up easily. Useful for having… No! He is my best friend and I absolutely do not think of him that way!

“You should really do something about those wrackspurts, Hermione.” Luna smiled blithely. “I have something, if you need it?”

Hermione flushed. “Uh, no thanks, Luna. And absolutely nothing is happening between Harry and I,” she said firmly.

Ginny grinned like the Cheshire Cat. “You took far too long to answer that question. This is bloody fantastic! I’m so glad you moved on from Ron. Bloody idiot, he is.”

“Language, Ginny,” Hermione said primly, trying desperately to ignore the nagging thoughts Ginny’s questions had pried up.

“But do you have feelings for him?” Ginny asked eagerly, clearly unwilling to let the conversation die.

Why wouldn’t she let it go?

“Of course not. I think of him like a brother.” Liar.

“Liar,” Ginny said, mirroring Hermione’s thoughts. “You think of Ron like a brother, that’s why you dumped him. And no one turns that red because of sisterly thoughts.”

“It’s warm in here,” Hermione argued defensively. *Oh yes, it’s not at all because you imagined a certain someone with dark hair holding you against a wall and shagging the living daylights out of you. Not at all.*

“It’s actually quite cool,” Luna commented.

Hermione shot her a look. *Not helping!* “Anyway, Ginny. I didn’t realize you were seeing
someone,” she said, desperately trying to change the subject.

Ginny gave her a look that said she knew exactly what Hermione was trying to do and was just humoring her by going along with her subject change. “I am. He’s tall, dark, and handsome and likes Quidditch. I really can’t ask for anything else in a man.” She looked insufferably smug.

“Anyone we know?” Luna asked.

“Oh yes,” Ginny smiled secretively.

“Are you going to tell us who it is?” Hermione asked. It was a rhetorical question. Ginny would tell them when she was good and ready.


Hermione got a very bad feeling. “What’s happening tonight?”

“We’re going out,” Ginny declared.

“That sounds lovely,” Luna said.

“I know! We haven’t been out together in ages. That’s the one bad thing about Quidditch.” Ginny looked briefly put out before perking back up. “But the season’s over and we are going out and having a good time!”

Luna looked at her watch, which didn’t look like it worked, but apparently told Luna whatever she wanted to know. “I have to go check on my radishes, but I’ll be there.”

“Perfect, I’ll owl you the details.” Ginny leaned over and gave Luna a hug.

“I’ll see you later.” Luna stood, gave Hermione a hug, left a few sickles on the table, and then glided out of the restaurant, waving before the shut behind her.

“It’s this great new club, comes highly recommended –”

“Ginny, I don’t have time, I can’t go.” Which wasn’t entirely true, but Ginny didn’t need to know that.

“Come on, Hermione,” Ginny whined. “It’ll be such fun. If you’re really not seeing Harry, then you can come to meet someone.”

Hermione’s eyes widened. “Absolutely not. I am not going to a bar to pick up some guy.”

“It’s a club, not a bar. And come on, Hermione. You haven’t dated anyone since what’s-his-face –”

“Anthony, you know his name is Anthony,” Hermione interrupted.

Ginny rolled her eyes. “Whatever. That ended two years ago and you haven’t been with anyone since.”

“So? I’m perfectly happy,” Hermione stated firmly. You had to be firm with Ginny.

“Are not. Harry owled me and said you’re bored and that’s why you’re resigning.” Ginny smirked. She was going to kill Harry. “That doesn’t mean I’m not happy.”
Ginny flipped her hair over one shoulder. “Doesn’t mean you are, either. Please? It’ll be fun!”

Hermione shook her head. “I don’t want to.”

“I don’t care. Parvati discovered this place—”

“No!” Hermione said, a little too loudly. Several heads turned in their direction, including the lady Ginny had wacked with her purse who gave her a disapproving look. “I am not going out with Parvati again, not after last time!” she said more quietly.

Ginny sighed dramatically. “Oh please, she promised that wouldn’t happen again.”

“I mean it, Ginny, no.” Hermione looked at her firmly.

“We’re leaving at nine, I’ll pick you up.”

Arguing with Ginny was like being run over by a steamroller. “I said no.”

“I’ve got this great dress you can wear. I picked it up when we were playing in Paris, you’ll look fantastic in it.” Ginny looked her up and down. “Yes, fantastic.”

*I’m talking to a wall.* “I’m busy tonight.”

“No, you’re not. You’re resigning, remember?” Ginny smiled smugly.

Hermione glanced around furtively. “I told you I haven’t announced that yet, keep your voice down.”

“You’re the one drawing attention,” Ginny argued. “I’ll be over at eight then, yeah? I’ll bring the dress. Oh! And I’ve got this great pair of heels that we can size to fit you. I’ll bring those too.”

“I am not going!” Surely Ginny hadn’t gone deaf?

“Make sure you shower before I get there, that way you’ll be mostly ready. Oh, and don’t forget to use Sleekeazy’s. I wish you’d let me teach you some beauty charms.”

“I told you, they’re too much trouble. And I will be doing paperwork tonight, so I don’t have time to go out.”

“I thought you said you were busy?” Ginny said slyly.

Hermione spluttered.

“Great! I’ll see you at eight!” Ginny grinned, dropped some sickles on the table, and then flounced out of the café before Hermione could come up with another reason not to go.

“I’m sure I said no,” Hermione muttered as she dug change out of her beaded bag.

*****

Half-seven that evening found Hermione in a towel and staring into her closet. She was desperately trying to find something that would keep her from having to wear whatever dress Ginny had decided that she should wear. As she stared into her mass of office robes, she knew she was out of luck before she even started looking. She never went out on her own, so she just didn’t own anything. Whenever Ginny dragged her out she always brought over whatever she wanted Hermione to wear, knowing that very thing.
“There must be something.” She glared into her closet before reluctantly starting to flip through the hangers.

After ten minutes, she gave up. She only had two dresses that weren’t for the office, and both were more suitable for a Ministry function than a night at whatever place Parvati had found. She resigned herself to having to wear whatever Ginny brought over.

Casting a Tempus charm and realizing she only had twenty minutes before Hurricane Ginny landed, she hurriedly started getting ready. She finished drying herself off, spelled her hair dry, and then took a seat in front of her vanity to start the long process of taming her hair.

By the time she heard the pop of Apparition, she had managed to get enough Sleekeazy’s into her hair that it was curled neatly instead of raging madly.

Ginny burst into the bedroom. “Excellent! I’m so glad you decided to come out with us tonight.” She grinned.

Is that your word for ignoring any and all of my objections? “I don’t recall having a choice.”

Ginny laughed. “Of course not. You’ll have fun. Promise.”

With a flourish, she dropped a garment bag onto Hermione’s bed. She watched with trepidation as Ginny carefully unzipped it and then pulled out something Hermione would never, ever have chosen to wear in a million years.

“Ginny! I am not wearing that!” Hermione protested, standing up from her position at her vanity.

“Nonsense, you’ll look amazing. Blokes’ll be falling all over you.” Ginny held up the dress in front of her. “Great color for you.”

“I don’t want blokes falling all over me. I’m not looking for someone, remember?” Hermione felt like she was having déjà vu.

Ginny yanked Hermione’s towel off without a thought for modesty. “I know, because you’re interested in Harry.” She eyed Hermione’s knickers speculatively. “Those aren’t nearly sexy enough.”

Hermione rolled her eyes to the ceiling while Ginny went to raid her drawers. “I am not interested in Harry! And my knickers are fine! Because I am not trying to attract someone.”

Ginny looked up at her in shock. “You don’t wear lingerie for a boy! You wear it for yourself! You wear it so you know that you look fabulous from head to toe, whether or not anyone else sees it or knows it. And with a dress like that, you will look sexy on the outside and I am going to make sure you feel sexy too.” She fixed Hermione with a stern look. “And the first step to that is nice lingerie.”

Ginny went back to pawing through Hermione’s underwear drawer, which she’d found with surprising skill.

“Fine,” Hermione conceded. “But don’t you dare try to set me up with anyone.”

Ginny grinned and stood up, holding a pair of black lacy knickers and the matching bra that Hermione had purchased on a whim after breaking up with Anthony. “I won’t need to with you in these and that dress.”
After that, Hermione resigned herself to letting Ginny play dress-up with her. The lingerie, which she had to admit did make her feel sexy, the dress, and the heels were on in record time. Ginny flatly refused to let Hermione see herself before she was completely dressed, insisting on fixing her hair and doing her makeup as well.

*Cinderella had it easy. Her fairy godmother just waved her wand and everything was perfect.* Hermione winced as the charm Ginny was using on her eyebrows seemed to yank out both of them at once.

“Much better,” Ginny said with satisfaction.

*But no, I get to be poked and prodded.* “Are you finished yet?” Hermione tried very hard not to sound like she was whinging.

“Almost.” Ginny applied more lipstick to her face, and then stepped back, scrutinizing. “Stand up.”

Hermione stood from the chair in front of her vanity, faced away from the mirror at Ginny’s absolute insistence. Ginny looked at her. Well, studied her, more like.

“Yes. I was right. You look bloody fantastic.” Ginny grinned. “You may now look in the mirror.”

Hermione scowled at her and then turned around. She held in a gasp, unwilling to be a complete Cinderella stereotype, but she was surprised by how good she looked. The short, tight, crimson satin dress that Ginny had brought really was a good color, and the fit accentuated all the right bits. The bra made her look like she had actual cleavage, and the black high heels made her legs look miles long.

She turned back around to face Ginny, noting that she was practically bouncing in excitement.

“So? What do you think?” Ginny asked impatiently.

Hermione finally allowed herself to smile, which quickly turned into a grin. “You’re a genius.”

“I know! Come on, let’s go. We’re almost late!”

Hermione picked up her wand and then looked down at herself in consternation. “Where am I supposed to put my wand? I don’t want to just hold it all night.”

Ginny laughed and then lifted the hem of her own short skirt dangerously high to reveal a black band hooked high around one thigh. “Thigh holster. Best thing ever invented for witches on the go. And I brought an extra.” She pulled one out of her handbag, dangling it on one finger. “I figured you wouldn’t have one. And you get to keep this, because you will definitely need it again if I have anything to say about it.”

Hermione rolled her eyes and refrained from arguing. There was absolutely no point, as she’d learned earlier that day. She took the band of what felt like silk. She hiked up her skirt and then fastened it around her leg. When she smoothed the satin back down, she noted that there was no indication that she was even wearing it – no line or wrinkle.

“High quality Disillusionment charm woven into the fabric,” Ginny explained when she noticed Hermione smoothing her hand over the fabric repeatedly. “Your wand and the band won’t ever show beneath what you’re wearing, no matter how…revealing.” Ginny winked.

“Clever,” Hermione murmured. She couldn’t help but admire the design, which allowed one to holster and release one’s wand surprisingly discreetly. After testing it a few times, she slipped her
wand into the holster, knowing Ginny would have to Side-Along her.

Ginny offered an arm. “Ready?”

Hermione grabbed her little beaded bag off her vanity, check to make sure everything she need was inside, and then nodded. “Okay, I’m ready.”

*****

They appeared outside what looked like an abandoned warehouse, but Hermione was sure it looked different inside. Ginny practically dragged her to the door, which likely had something to do with that fact that Hermione was dragging her heels a little. Ginny was far stronger than her, however, and they were soon in front of a mass of rotting wooden slats masquerading as a door.

Ginny tapped her wand against the wood three times and it swung inwards. They stepped through and everything was immediately louder and smokier and darker. They’d entered what looked like a hallway with a line of people. The walls were painted black and a single line of lights hovered in the air. Ginny continued pulling on her arm, bypassing the line. Hermione started to protest but Ginny waved a hand to hush her.

“I know the owner.” Ginny smirked over her shoulder.

Hermione sighed and allowed herself to be towed to the front of the line. A very tall wizard with a gratuitous amount of muscle holding a wand stood at the front of the line next to a smaller but still well-muscled wizard holding a parchment.

“Ginny Weasley and guest,” Ginny said to the parchment wizard.

The parchment wizard glanced at them and then down at his parchment, which Hermione could see now had a list of names. “Go ahead.”

The tall wizard stepped aside and they entered a small room, also black – Hermione was beginning to sense a theme – with a witch standing off to the side.

“Any robes to check?”

“No, thank you,” Ginny said breezily, continuing to pull on Hermione’s arm.

“I’m going to have bruises tomorrow,” Hermione informed her, trying to be heard over the pulsing music.

“Not from me, but I’m sure plenty of wizards here would be more than happy to help if you want some in more interesting places.” Ginny winked.

She dragged her into another room, which turned out to be the dance floor, up a flight of stairs off to the side, and then into a room with a wall of windows looking down over the dance floor, before finally releasing her. Hermione rubbed her arm and winced.

“I told you –”

“Yes, of course, you’re interested in Harry,” she said dismissively. “What do you want to drink?”

Hermione scowled at Ginny, but she had turned to greet the other witches who were already in the room and didn’t see.

Hermione counted Padma and Parvati, Luna, Cho and Astoria, Katie, and Angelina. A nice group of
friends, she had to admit.

She was greeted with a chorus of “Hermione!” and pulled into tight hugs.

“You look fabulous!” Parvati squealed. “You were so right about the dress, Ginny.”

Ginny looked insufferably smug. “I know.”

The conversation devolved into chatter about the week and about Ginny’s season as they settled into the comfortable couches in the room. Several rounds of shots were ordered and consumed. By half past ten, Hermione was pleasantly tipsy and starting to relax. She was chatting happily with Cho and Astoria about work at the orphans’ home when a screech from by the windows drew their attention.

Parvati, who had been engaged in an intense giggle-filled discussion with Ginny, was pointing at something on the dance floor. Katie and Angelina, who had been sitting on the other couch, stood up to go investigate.

“Is that Draco Malfoy?”

“He looks fantastic!”

“Not so pointy anymore.”

“Look at that jawline!”

“And those cheekbones!”

Hermione lost track of who said what, but she was surprised that Draco would be at a nightclub. And more than surprised that none of the witches had mentioned anything about wings. Giving in to her curiosity, she joined them at the window and looked at the subject of their attention.

She had to admit, he did look good. Oh yes, because you didn’t notice before.

She watched as he approached the bar and almost immediately received a drink. How on earth does he manage it? He turned back to the club, looking around and then glanced up, straight at her.

He’s looking at the window, not at me. It’s just a trick of the lights.

He stared at her for a long moment. At the window, not me. And then he slowly raised his glass, eyes never leaving hers, and took a sip, and she noticed that whatever he’d ordered, it was silvery grey. Like his eyes. And his wings, of which there were no sign. When he lowered his glass, he licked his lower lip to catch a drop and she didn’t know how, but she could have sworn she felt his tongue trace over her own lip.

She raised a hand to touch her lip and found that it was damp. He winked.

Oh fuck.

Chapter End Notes

Read/review/comment please!
After Malfoy’s visit on Monday morning, Harry spent the rest of the day on the paperwork for his case. With his statement, Harry was able to finally move forward on finalizing the charges against Dunham – the man who had taken Malfoy prisoner. It was a long process with copious amounts of paperwork. After spending the rest of Monday and all of Tuesday on it, he could easily see why Hermione hated it – not that he’d ever really liked it.

On Wednesday at the end of the day, after spending the day going through paperwork for various other cases, he went down to the holding cells in the Department of Mysteries to question Dunham again. The man had been annoyingly reticent and Harry had quite a few questions he wanted answers to.

Once he’d descended to the DoM, he walked along the black-tiled corridors until he reached Dunham’s holding cell. He nodded at the Unspeakable guarding the door, who let him in after a quick spell to verify his identity.

Dunham was sitting on a cot in the corner and looked up at Harry’s entrance. He sniffed. “Back again?”

Harry took a deceptively relaxed pose leaning against the wall by the door. “Dunham.”

Harry noted that he seemed to have gotten thinner even in the week that he’d been in holding; although the law enforcement had undergone major reordering after the war, prisoners still didn’t get huge meals. Otherwise, he was unremarkable. Pale brown hair fell limply over a round face with dull brown eyes. He was pale bordering on pasty and just this side of portly. Harry wouldn’t have given him a second look on the street if Dunham hadn’t reminded him uncomfortably of a younger version of Peter Pettigrew.
“Come to ask more questions?”

Harry flicked his eyes up to Dunham’s face. “Oh no, just dropping by. Checking on prisoners is part of the job.” He kept his tone relaxed and his face calm.

Dunham sneered, but it didn’t have near the aristocratic edge that Malfoy’s had that made him look so attractive even with his lip curled.

Why am I thinking about Malfoy’s attractiveness right now?

“Maybe they just don’t give the precious Harry Potter real field work. I noticed you weren’t on the front line.” Dunham sneered again.

“Were you expecting me?” Harry asked mildly.

He scoffed. “Of course not. You’re far too precious to the Ministry to put in danger.”

Harry resisted the urge to snort. He didn’t want to offend Dunham so much he stopped talking, not when he was finally doing more than glaring. The DoM would do that to people, though. “So I’m only good for office work?”

“Of course. You were never good for much, even during the war.”

Harry raised an eyebrow. “I didn’t know they gave out Orders of Merlin for doing nothing.”

“They gave you that Order because they needed a hero. Someone for people to adore. And they adore you. You’re nothing special. A paper pusher. The Boy-Who-Lived, good for nothing but filling out forms. Bet your parents would be so proud of you.”

Harry kept his expression neutral, even though the words hurt more than he expected. “I imagine they’d be proud of other things,” was all he said in reply.


Harry shrugged, although he was interested in the way he’d phrased that. “I think the papers would argue differently.”

“They would, wouldn’t they? Makes a good story, with your parents, and that scar.” Dunham threw a hand toward his head in a gesture that was barely controlled. “They don’t care to look at the work us ordinary people do. The people without the special stories and the Orders of Merlin.”

Now we’re getting somewhere. “Lots of people besides me fought in the war.”

Dunham bared his teeth. “The war. The war! As if that’s all that matters!” He stood up and started pacing.

Harry kept his place against the wall, but he did slip his wand into his hand so it would be easy to use in case he needed to Stun him.

“The war scared everyone away from any magic that wasn’t squeaky clean.” He paced faster.

“I don’t think Dumbledore was squeaky clean,” Harry said dryly.

“But he died! When people die, they’re martyrs. Now that he’s dead it doesn’t matter if he wasn’t the paragon everyone thought he was. But because of that stupid war, no one will consider anything but
harmless magic “good.” Everything in the grey area is vilified. It doesn’t matter if it’s personal. Doesn’t harm anyone. It’s not dangerous. Should be fine. Should’ve been fine.”

Harry wondered if Dunham were becoming unhinged.

“But you wouldn’t leave it alone! Just had to keep poking around. I was so close! I just needed more time. A little more time. Just a little. It would’ve worked. And it wasn’t bad. But no, because of that stupid war!” On the last two words he turned on Harry.

With the reflexes of war and training, Harry flicked his wand at Dunham, the nonverbal spell knocking Dunham backward toward the bed. After a quick levitating spell to get him fully onto the bed, Harry knocked on the cell door.

The Unspeakable to a quick look through the grate and then opened the door. He checked Harry’s identity again before nodding and letting him out. Harry nodded in return and then started back up to the DMLE.

Even though he never noticed the chill when he was in the Department of Mysteries, Harry felt distinctly warmer once he was back upstairs. He returned to his office to think about his conversation with Dunham. He noted down some of the important details, intending to discuss it later with Hermione.

His thoughts were interrupted by a note winging into his forehead and then dropping onto his desk. The major complaint of everyone who worked at the Ministry was the spell used to be able to send notes and memos from person to person and department to department. It was incredibly useful, but the little paper airplanes they took the shape of unfailingly aimed for the center of one’s forehead. Most people used a minor shield charm to keep from having a permanent red mark. Harry usually had one, but in his distraction he’d forgotten to replace it after his trip to the DoM.

He grimaced and rubbed the spot where it had hit before opening the folded paper.

Potter,

Meeting in my office. Ten minutes.

-Robards

It was short and to the point. Harry cast a quick Tempus and was displeased to note that it was already after six. He didn’t usually leave the office until after seven, but it was irritating to be called in for a meeting after the work day had already ended.

He finished writing up his thoughts and then made the short walk to Robards office.

He knocked on the open door before walking in.

“You wanted to see me, sir?”

Robards looked up and waved him into a seat. “Come in. Yes, I did.”

Harry closed the door and then took a seat and waited while Robards seemed to gather his thoughts with the unnervingly direct stare he’d mastered.

“How is the Malfoy case coming?”
Harry resisted the urge to raise an eyebrow. Was that what he was being called in for? “It’s fine. I just spoke to Dunham, and I think I’m finally getting somewhere on figuring out his motives.”

Robards nodded. “Excellent.”

When he didn’t seem inclined to say anything else, Harry spoke up again. “Is there something wrong? I didn’t think there was a rush on the case.”

Robards was silent for another moment before sighing. “Not from me, there isn’t. Lucius Malfoy has decided to make himself a nuisance.”

Harry leaned back in his chair and nodded. “I see.”

“He isn’t the man he used to be, of course, and Kingsley has no patience for him. Unfortunately, he still has enough influence among those friends of his to make life difficult if he wanted to.”

Harry didn’t have to ask to know that he meant the purebloods. And despite the war, purebloods still held influential positions at the Ministry and at the *Daily Prophet*. “What does he want?”

Robards rolled his eyes. “For this case to go away as quickly and as quietly as possible. I assume he doesn’t want it on the record that the precious Malfoy blood isn’t so pure as they’ve made it out to be. Regardless, he wants this case closed and quickly.”

Harry raised an eyebrow. “He knows that it has to go to trial, doesn’t he?”

“He’s demanded a closed trial, on behalf of his son. However, because Draco is of age, and Lucius was stripped of his title as Head of the family, he’s the one, or his lawyer, who has to make the official request.” Robards looked at Harry with exasperation clear on his face. “So expect a visit from that slimy lawyer of his, or maybe even the man himself, in the next few days.”

Harry considered that for a moment. Although Draco didn’t seem eager to be there, he hadn’t seemed particularly anxious to have it done and over with, and he’d walked in there with his wings on display as well, *and what nice wings they were*. But the Auror Office was discreet and no news about the case, or Malfoy’s status as a Veela, had yet reached the press. “Perhaps it would be better as a private trial anyway.”

Robards leaned forward. “Why’s that?”

“Because I think, although I’m not sure yet, that Dunham was working on a way to turn himself into a Veela.”

Robards frowned. “That’s impossible.”

Harry shrugged. “I thought so too, but he seemed to believe he was close. I was going to talk to Hermione Granger about it and see if she had any insight.”

“Granger. She’s head of the Department of Magical Creatures, isn’t she?”

Harry nodded.

“Yes. Good idea. And I see your point. Don’t want other people getting the idea to take up where he left off.” Robards had always been quick on the uptake. It was the reason he was such a good Head Auror.
“Fine. Write up anything you or Granger find in your report. Try to have it to me by next week.”

“I’m not sure if I’ll have answers that soon. We may need to study the books he was using, or something else.”

Robards sighed. “Very well. Take the time you need, but do hurry. I hate Lucius Malfoy breathing down my neck.”

Harry fervently agreed with that feeling. “I’ll do my best, sir. And do I have permission to discuss the particulars of the case with Hermione?”

“Of course. Have a good night, Potter.” Robards waved his wand to open the door.

“Sir.”

Harry walked slowly back to his office and then mindlessly began to pack up the papers he wanted to take home. The conversation with Robards, although interesting, wasn’t what was occupying his mind. Instead, all he could think about was Malfoy, and not even Lucius. No, Draco Malfoy seemed to be taking up an inordinate amount of space in his thoughts lately. Normally, cases didn’t follow him home. He made sure of it. Now, he went to sleep at night thinking about Malfoy and those damned wings of his. *He’s not that compelling and you’ve seen attractive people before. Sure, he’s filled out in all the right ways, and he looks like he’s kept fit, and those wings are bloody gorgeous and… Stop!*

Harry shook his head forcefully as though that would clear the picture of Draco – *Malfoy* – standing on the bed with his wings flared, looking down his nose at them, from his mind. It didn’t.

Annoyed, he grabbed his now-full briefcase and made his way to the Atrium to Floo home. Although he would normally have Apparated, he wasn’t sure he wouldn’t have Splinched himself with his mind as twisted up as it was. At this time of the evening, the end-of-day rush had already diminished and he didn’t have to wait for a fireplace to clear before he was able to leave.

*****

The next day, Harry dropped by Hermione’s office earlier than he normally would have to pick her up for lunch.

He knocked on her door and waited for her to look up.

It took her a minute before she did. “Oh! Hello, Harry.”

He took that as permission to come in and take a seat. “Morning, Hermione.”

Hermione looked around for something on her desk before looking back at him, frowning. “Did we have plans for lunch today?”

Harry shook his head. “No, this is work-related, but I thought you might want to discuss it over lunch somewhere.” He could see that she easily heard the words he hadn’t said.

Hermione nodded. “Give me a minute.”

Harry waited patiently while she packed up a few things, shuffled the papers on her desk, and then grabbed her cloak off the stand by the door. “Ready?” he asked, standing.

Hermione ran an absent hand over her hair in a way that was more perfunctory than purposeful.
“Yes.”

Together they took the lift down to the Atrium where they Apparated to Diagon Alley. Without speaking, they walked to the little café they usually went to for lunch. Once they’d taken a seat and given their orders to the friendly waitress, Harry started.

“I had a chat with Dunham yesterday.”

Hermione’s eyebrows went up. “You’ve had several of those. Was this one more productive? Did he finally say something?”

Harry’s lip quirked. “You could say that. He finally talked about that ritual he was working, anyway.”

Hermione leaned forward. “Really? Well what did he say?”

Harry rubbed a hand through his hair. “It mostly sounded like nonsense, and nothing specific, but I gathered that he thought he was very close to succeeding. He didn’t say exactly what he was trying to accomplish, but I think he thought it was “real” magic, whatever that means. He seemed impressed with himself, between the lunatic rambling.”

Hermione’s mouth twisted. “I doubt anyone who thought they could turn themselves into a Veela is completely sane. But it’s good that he didn’t succeed.”

“You think he could have?” Harry said incredulously.

The waitress came by and dropped off their food before Hermione could respond. Once they’d both taken a few bites, she answered.

“I don’t know whether it’s possible, although I don’t think it is. I’ve never read anything about it. But I’d love to get a look at those books, if for nothing else than to try to figure out what he thought he was doing. Creating new spells is tricky, and if they involve magical creatures they’re even trickier.”

Harry frowned. “Because of the inherent magic?”

Hermione nodded enthusiastically. “Exactly. Creatures like Veela have magic of their own, in addition to wizarding magic, and it causes all kinds of interference. Not with ordinary spells, mind you, but anything having to do with their magical core. That’s why making wands is so difficult. It mixes wizarding magic with inherent magic embedded in the wand cores.”

Harry shook his head. “I’ll take your word for it. But Robards did give me the go-ahead to let you take a look at the case files and the evidence. He wants to know, and I do as well, how close Dunham actually was, or whether he was just spouting nonsense. Can you take a look?”

“Of course! It’ll have to be this weekend because I’ve got paperwork that I have to work on, including some for this case.” She looked sheepish, as though she felt guilty about having to work.

Harry didn’t want her to feel guilty. “That’s no problem at all! You still have a job of our own. It’d be awful if you got fired before you could resign,” he joked.

Hermione smiled. She has a nice smile. Which is totally normal to notice about a friend. I am not staring at her mouth.

“So I’ll drop by this weekend?” Harry asked, wondering why he felt warm all of a sudden. He would not tug at his robes like a fidgety teenager.
Hermione nodded. “Sounds good. Sunday would be better because I’ll be working at the home on Saturday.”

“Perfect. I’ll owl you before I come over.”

They both finished eating before heading back to the Ministry and parting ways.

*****

After another long day on Thursday – although he’d at least gotten out of the office to go break up a brawl in Knockturn Alley – he was very much looking forward to a hot shower and some time to relax when he got home.

He’d just finished his shower when someone knocked on the door of his flat. Since he had heavy wards up that were undisturbed, he knew that the person was almost certainly a friend, but he took his wand with him anyway.

When he opened the door and was nearly bowled over by someone with long red hair, he remembered that he was only in a towel. When Ginny, for it could be no one else, pulled back, she had a distinct twinkle in her eye.

“I did miss the sight of you in a towel,” she teased. She winked at him before sauntering into living room and plopping onto his couch.

Harry rolled his eyes and went into his bedroom. He changed into sweatpants and a t-shirt before going back out to greet Ginny properly.

“Nice to see you again, Gin,” he said, smiling. He took a seat in the armchair.

Ginny grinned at him. “Lovely to see you, Harry.”

“I saw the Harpies did well. Ron and I made it to the game against the Canons.”

Ginny laughed. “Probably the only one you could convince him to go to.”

Harry shrugged, although she wasn’t wrong. “You played brilliantly.”

“Thanks!” Her grin lit up her whole face.

“Did they renew your contract?” he asked.

“Yes!” Ginny exclaimed. “For three more years!”

“That’s fantastic, Ginny.”

“I know,” she said. Her attempt at smugness was ruined by the genuine happiness she exuded.

“So what brings on this unexpected visit?”

“Well it’s not my fault that you answered in your towel, is it?” Ginny retorted.

Harry gave her a look. “Well you didn’t exactly send an owl.”

Ginny waved a hand. “I only got back a couple days ago. I wanted to see my favorite Wizarding Savior.” She blinked her eyes at him.
Harry scowled, even though he knew she was joking. “I hate that name.”

“I know,” she said, pleased.

Harry rolled his eyes again. If anything, Ginny had always felt a little more like a little sister than a girlfriend. It was part of the reason they’d broken up not long after she’d graduated from Hogwarts. She’d admitted that some of it had been hero-worship on her part and they’d parted amicably.

“So how are you?” Ginny asked, interrupting his thoughts.

Harry smiled. “I’m good. Being an Auror isn’t quite as exciting as it used to be, of course, but it’s nice not to be chasing down Death Eaters every other week.”

Ginny nodded sympathetically. “I can imagine.”

“Things did pick up a little when they started giving us some cases from the Magical Law Enforcement Patrol. They were swamped and half our Aurors were sitting at their desks doing nothing.” Harry shrugged. He didn’t really like breaking up domestics, but it was something to do.

“So you get to rescue kittens and stop people from shouting in the street?” Ginny looked amused.

“It’s a glamorous life,” Harry said dryly.

“Sounds like it,” Ginny said, laughing. “And everyone else?”

“Good, really good. Ron’s helping with the preparations for the next World Cup. Luna just got back from a trip to Romania for The Quibbler.”

“What about Hermione?” Ginny asked, kicking her feet up onto the coffee table. Harry was glad to see that she’d taken her shoes off.

For some reason, he blushed. Maybe because you were thinking about kissing her earlier? Er, not kissing. Just her mouth. Wrapped around — No! Just how nice her smile is! Yeah, her smile. He cleared his throat. “She’s good. We meet for lunch a few times a week.”

Ginny leaned toward him in a way that was nearly predatory. “Why are you blushing? Do you like Hermione? Are you seeing her? And you didn’t tell me!”

Harry ran a hand through his hair, desperately trying not to think about anything to do with seeing her. “No! Not at all. Haven’t you gone to see her yet? Surely you could ask her how she’s doing.”

“I’m seeing her tomorrow, actually,” Ginny said, an infuriating smile on her face.

Harry frowned. “We are not seeing each other, Ginny.”

“Oh, of course,” she replied airily.

Harry squinted at her as if that would make her thoughts clear. But he’d never been much good at reading her. He sighed. “You’re not going to let this go.” It was a statement.

Ginny smiled and leaned over to pat his cheek. “I think you’d make a great couple.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Ginny.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t say anything to her. Anyway, you’re both my friends and it’s been ages since we all got together. Us girls are going out tomorrow, why don’t you round up some of the boys and
meet us at this club Parvati knows?’”

He sighed thoughtfully. “I suppose that would be nice.” He was pretty sure it was a set up, but it had been a while since they’d all gotten together. With Ginny off playing Quidditch, Luna in Romania, Neville at Hogwarts, and Seamus and Dean spending most of their time in Ireland. “Yeah, I’ll send out some owls.”

Ginny clapped her hands together. “Excellent! How about half ten? Have you got some parchment? I’ll write down the address so you can Apparate or Floo.”

Harry dug around until he’d produced a scrap of parchment and a self-inking quill. Ginny quickly jotted down an address that was only just legible, blowing on it to dry.

Harry read it over quickly before sending into the kitchen with a wave of his hand.

Ginny hopped up. “Well, it’s been lovely to see you, and I’ll see you tomorrow night, yeah?”

Harry stood as well. “Yeah. Nice seeing you too, Gin.” He pulled her into a hug and he couldn’t help but feel glad that they’d remained friends. Hugging Ginny was nice, but it wasn’t like hugging Hermione.

_I think of her as a sister! A sister! I do not think of Hermione as a romantic partner. Or a lover. Definitely not. And I am only looking forward to seeing her tomorrow as a friend. I do not want to see her that way. Or in a towel. Or naked._

Harry released Ginny a little quicker when he realized things were about to get very awkward.

“I’ll see you tomorrow, then.”

Ginny gave him a funny look before shrugging and Flooing home.

Harry took a deep breath. Maybe he needed to relax a different way than he’d planned.

Chapter End Notes

Review/comment/kudos all appreciated!
The pain started on Wednesday. The warmth from his meeting with Potter on Monday had faded throughout the day on Tuesday, and for the most part Draco had been relieved, but a small, traitorous part of him that he pretended didn’t exist had been disappointed. When he’d woken up, he’d felt an all-over ache as though he had the flu. Just like the warmth, he’d decided to ignore it and hope it went away.

He spent the rest of the day trying to distract himself by reading through the books on Veela again and working on controlling his wings. He successfully managed a short flight outside in the garden; he did not manage a successful landing. He was very glad that no one had seen except for one of his father’s peacocks.

By the end of the day on Wednesday, he managed to work out how to sheath his wings. Although he was rather fond of them, and had spent more than an hour standing in front of the mirror admiring them, they were somewhat of a nuisance to have out all the time. It wasn’t quite comfortable to have them tucked away – his back felt oddly out of shape and his skin felt too tight, even though there was no noticeable sign that he had wings besides two raised red lines running vertically beside his shoulder blades – but it was nice not having to try to compensate for the added weight. He’d nearly fallen on his face walking down the stairs more than once.

When he woke on Thursday, the ache had turned into actual pain that no potion seemed to dim. He’d read as much as he could to discover what was happening. He’d found what he thought was the answer and he was both pleased and displeased. When Blaise dropped by early in the afternoon, he was more than happy to have a distraction.

He met him in the Blue Parlor, which was the most comfortable when he had his wings out, as he did most of the time. He really didn’t like the feeling of having them pulled in.

“Blaise, how are you?” Draco asked, walking into the parlor.

Blaise looked up from pouring a cup of tea. “I’m well, Draco.”

Draco sat as elegantly as possible, spreading his wings behind the couch. “And your mother?”
“On her honeymoon,” Blaise replied dryly. “So I imagine she’s perfectly content. For now.”

Draco smirked. Madam Zabini was infamous for her string of husbands, although Draco knew that it was a bit of sore spot for Blaise. “So you have the estate to yourself then?”

Blaise smiled slightly. “Yes, for the most part.”

Draco raised an eyebrow. “Oh?”

“I have, most generously, been sharing it with a certain female friend for a couple of months now,” Blaise said in his low, smooth drawl.

Draco kept his overt surprise hidden. “A couple of months? That seems unusually long for you to keep a…female friend around.”

Blaise smiled again, but softer. “Yes, normally, but she’s quite special I assure you.”

Draco made a soft noise of agreement and inquiry that Blaise apparently chose to ignore.

“But enough about me, how are things with you? Exponentially more interesting, I presume,” Blaise said, a slight dip of his head indicating the wings.

Draco smirked. “I’m sure I don’t know what you mean.” He settled back into the couch.

“I heard Daphne and Astoria were over here the other day.”

“Yes. Daphne hasn’t changed, as I’m sure you know. Astoria is a sweet little thing, though.”

Blaise quirked a brow. “Not like her sister, then?”

“Not at all,” Draco said, keeping his face neutral when the pain in his abdomen became stabbing as he talked about Astoria.

“I’m sure your mother is pleased you find her sweet.”

Draco only barely resisted the urge to roll his eyes. *I’m turning into Potter. Although his eyes are a lovely shade of green… fuck.* With an effort he dragged his mind away from Potter and back to Astoria. “She was quite pleased with the luncheon, I believe.”

“Were you?” Blaise asked, as if the answer didn’t matter all.

“It was agreeable,” Draco lied. He only just managed to keep a wince off his face when his back started spasming.

Blaise idly picked up his teacup and took a sip. “My mother has been hinting, ever so subtly, of course, that it is time I thought about producing an heir.”

“My mother has similar aspirations,” Draco said. He tried to imagine producing an heir with Astoria. The nausea he’d felt after kissing her hand returned tenfold, and the pain in his chest became blinding. Dots started blotting out his vision and he couldn’t keep himself from hunching over to try to minimize the pain. His wings curled over him, blocking the light from the window.

*Why is this happening? I don’t really want to marry her!*
Dimly, he was aware that Blaise was calling his name.

“Draco? Draco!”

All he could think about was the pain. *Bloody Veela heritage!*

“Draco, mate, what the hell is wrong with you?” Blaise grabbed his shoulder. *When did he get over here? *“Should I call a Healer?”

Draco moved his shoulder to get Blaise to let go. It was barely more than a twitch, but he seemed to understand. “I’m fine,” he gritted, forcing himself out of a ball and flexing his wings. “Let’s talk about something else.”

Blaise returned to his seat, staring at him warily. “Sure. Let’s start with what the fuck just happened.”

Draco rolled his shoulders, attempting to ease the cramps that had developed. He tried to think random thoughts to take his mind off...her. He ran through the financial figures he’d reviewed this week, then mentally counted off all the animals currently on Manor grounds. By the time he’d finished, the nausea had passed and he was able to sit up straight without wincing.

Draco took a deep breath. Blaise was his closest friend, he could tell him. “I think I’m having mating pains,” he muttered.

Blaise frowned. “Mating pains? Is that a Veela thing?”

Draco shrugged a shoulder. “An unfortunate side effect. From what I’ve read, after I’ve transformed, once I meet my mate, or mates, I will experience increasing discomfort and pain unless I am in close proximity or physical contact with them until we’ve bonded,” he quoted. He scowled. “And apparently, I experience discomfort and pain when discussing those who are not my mate in such a context.”

Blaise grimaced. “That’s shit luck. I take it your mate is not one of the Greengrass sisters?”

Draco’s wings flared without conscious thought. “Definitely not.”

Blaise eyed his wings for a moment before turning his attention back to Draco. “Do you know who your mate is, then? You can’t have met that many people since you transformed.”

Draco rolled his shoulders again. He was fairly certain who they were, but he absolutely did not want to believe it. *Maybe it’s just because they’re the people who rescued me? That must be it.* He ignored the fact that they hadn’t actually been the ones to find him. “I know who they are.”

Blaise’s eyes widened, as Draco had thought they would. “They?”

Draco tried to smirk but it fell flat. Instead he shrugged again. “It happens, sometimes.”

“How many?”

“Two.”

Blaise leaned back, looking thoughtful. “Triads aren’t that common anymore.” He pointed a finger at Draco. “You’re special.”

“Of course,” Draco drawled.

Blaise smirked snidely. “So you know who your mates are, but you haven’t claimed them?” He
cocked his head to the side.

Draco took a sip of his now-cold tea. “They aren’t the sort of people to be receptive to the old ideas about Veelas and their mates.”

Blaise frowned. “Not purebloods then. Even though the lot of them would never admit it, they’re a bunch of romantics about Veelas. My mother used to tell me bedtime stories about soulmates. Utter nonsense, of course.”

Draco smirked. *Daphne certainly seemed intrigued.* “It’s not exactly romantic, no. But you are correct, not purebloods.”

“Well that narrows the list down considerably. How many people who aren’t purebloods do you interact with anyway? It can’t be many.”

Draco shrugged. It was true, after the war he hadn’t made an effort to expand his social circle. “It’s not.”

“Merlin’s balls, Draco. How many Muggle-borns can you possibly have met in a week?”

Draco noted that Blaise hadn’t said Mudblood. Not that Draco himself was comfortable with the word anymore. Too many bad memories, too much hypocrisy. His wings fluttered slightly in what could have passed as a shiver. “I don’t have to have just met them,” Draco replied, deciding to give Blaise a little help.

“Ah.” Blaise tapped a finger against his lip. “Still not helpful. It’s not like I know your schedule. I have an actual life.” Blaise smirked at him.

Draco gave in and rolled his eyes. “Unlike you, I actually run my own estate.”

Blaise grinned. “Why on earth would I involve myself in paperwork when I can hire someone to do it?”

Draco decided a lecture on fiscal responsibility would be wasted on Blaise. “Well if you’re really seeing someone then I doubt you have as much of a life as you used to.”

Blaise shrugged. “We’re not exclusive.”

Draco raised an eyebrow. “Does she know that?”

“She suggested it.” Blaise sighed. “She’s perfect.”

“Spare me the details.”

Blaise smirked. “She’s in town this weekend; you should come out with us.”

“No, thank you,” Draco said dryly. “I have no desire to tag along on your date.”

“Not a date,” Blaise said. “She’s inviting a few of her friends. Might as well invite a few of my own.”

“How many of our ‘old friends’ do you still speak to?” Draco inquired.

“Well, not many,” Blaise admitted.

“Then invite the others and I’ll think about it.”
Blaise smiled slightly. “Good. But don’t think I’ve forgotten that you never told me who your mates are.”

“Are you giving up already?” Draco mocked.

Blaise gave him the look of bored disappointment that Draco was sure he’d learned from Madam Zabini.

Draco flicked his fringe out his face. “Fine. They’re Potter and Granger.”

Blaise leaned forward and gaped, seemingly struck dumb. He sputtered before managing to form words. “Potter? And Granger? Oh, mate, you are so f**ked.”

As he lay in bed that night, Draco thought about what to do. Blaise wasn’t entirely wrong. I am f**ked. But hopefully it’s not all one-sided. Telling Blaise about his mates had helped him admit to himself that he did know who they were. Of course, he’d known from the first moment in that safe house as he stared down at them. He just hadn’t wanted to admit it. Part of him, the part that still clung to the hope that he would wake up the next morning with no wings, hoped that if he denied it, it wouldn’t be true. But the pain had only been getting worse and he was fairly certain he had a fever.

In the darkness and privacy of his room with his wings curled around him, Draco could admit to himself, finally, that he was pleased to have found his mates. His thoughts after he’d been rescued had still been controlled by the Veela and when he’d looked at them it was as though they were surrounding by shining halos. They hadn’t been, of course, but in the eyes of his Veela they had both looked utterly perfect. Neither of them had been far from his mind in the days since then, although he’d had better control after the Veela had subsided back into the recesses of his mind.

When he’d gone in to see Potter on Monday, the Veela had come out to play and the urge to go around the desk and wrap Potter up in his wings had very nearly overaken him. He’d been too stressed and in too much denial to admit what he felt, and he’d masked it with annoyance and anger. The reading he’d done during the week had only confirmed what his Veela had already known – Potter was his mate.

He hadn’t known that Granger was also his mate until after the luncheon with Daphne and Astoria. After that, it was obvious. He had wanted to scrub himself raw after kissing the Greengrass sisters, even though it had been the most proper of kisses, and on their hands, no less. But the feeling of wrongness hadn’t abated until after a long shower. And the driving urge to go find her hadn’t abated until he’d turned the water as cold as it could get.

He fell asleep that night thinking of green eyes and curly brown hair.

*****

In the morning, Draco sent off an owl to Blaise letting him know that he would be at the club Blaise had mentioned before leaving the day before. If the girl Blaise was seeing was inviting her own friends, that meant they weren’t Blaise’s friends, which meant they were almost certainly not Slytherins or purebloods. And that meant there was a solid chance they would be Gryffindors. Even if Potter or Granger weren’t there, the night may prove useful as a way to start ingratiating himself with their friends.

He went down to breakfast with a lightness he hadn’t felt since returning to the Manor. His mother
was already in the solarium, sipping a cup of tea and staring out into the gardens. A place had already been laid for him across the table with a copy of *The Daily Prophet* lying beside his plate. He sat down and gently placed a linen napkin in his lap.

“Good morning, Mother.”

She turned and smiled at him. “Good morning, Draco.”

“How are you?”

And elf popped in and placed a plate of fresh scones and various toppings on the table.

“I’m well,” she said, delicately selecting a scone. “How did you sleep?”

Draco helped himself. “Quite well.”

Talk subsided as they ate a few bites. Draco started reading the newspaper. It was mostly nonsense, but occasionally there was something of substance. So far, nothing about him or his case had popped up. He should really give the Aurors more credit. Thinking about the Aurors called up visions of Potter and he had to push away those thoughts or he’d need another cold shower. He was getting rather tired of those.

“Was that Blaise who came to the house yesterday?”

Draco glanced up from reading the *Prophet*. “Yes, it was. He dropped in for a visit.”

“That’s nice,” his mother said neutrally. She’d never much liked Madam Zabini, but the Zabinis were purebloods and therefore couldn’t be snubbed.

“Yes, we had a nice chat. I’ll be going out with him tonight.”

“Hmm.” She eyed him over her teacup. “How have you been, dear?”

“I’m…better now. I was feeling unwell but I think I’ve solved the problem.” It was true. Ever since he’d told Blaise about his mates, the aches and pains had diminished and his fever had disappeared.

His mother frowned, as close to outward concern as she would get now that the war was over. “You were unwell? Why did you not tell me?”

Draco set the paper aside. “I didn’t wish to worry you.”

“I am not a wilting flower, I am your mother.” She gave him a look. “Next time, you will tell me.”

Draco smiled at her indulgently. “Of course, Mother. But really, it was nothing to worry about. I told you, I’ve solved the problem.”

His mother took a delicate bite of her scone. “And what was the problem?”

He shrugged. “Mating pains.”

His mother sat bolt upright. “Mating pains? You mean, you’ve found your mate?”

Draco calmly selected a scone off the plate, cut it in half, and then spread marmalade evenly across one half. When he looked up again at his mother, he was certain her look would have caused one of the society pureblood witches to flee. Draco smirked. “Yes, I have. Two of them, in fact.”
She leaned forward. “Two? You have two mates? Oh that’s wonderful, Draco! There hasn’t been a triad in more than two decades!”

“So Blaise informed me.” Draco took a bit of his scone.

His mother looked at him disapprovingly. “You told Blaise of this?” The before me was implied.

Draco raised an eyebrow but didn’t respond.

His mother settled back in her chair, back perfectly straight, and took a sip of tea. “Who are they?”

Draco grinned. “Hermione Granger and Harry Potter.”

The sound of china shattering on stone echoed through the room.

Draco made his way to his study upstairs after breakfast. He settled into his comfortable leather chair, a satisfied grin making its way onto his face. His mother might be in shock now, but he was sure she would warm to the idea and turn her mind to ways of this information to their advantage. He was looking forward to that discussion. An owl arrived to interrupt his thoughts. He recognized the handwriting and opened it to find a short note from Blaise with instructions on how to Apparate to the club that night. It was in London, quite far from Diagon Alley, but that probably suited the proprietors and visitors alike.

He spent the rest of the morning working on estate business. When the Wizengamot had revoked his father’s title as Head of House, the burden had fallen to Draco. In order to keep up with the many investments, properties, and businesses, he had to spend several hours a day looking over reports, even with several teams of highly qualified businessmen and lawyers to oversee most of the Malfoy interests. He found it far more interesting than he had originally anticipated, but it was still tiring work.

After reviewing a monthly report from the wizard in charge of the Arithmancy Division at Malfoy Enterprises, Draco sat back. Like the last three reports from that wizard, it had been disappointing. Although couched in fancy language, it essentially said that, so far, he had yet to accomplish anything. Draco had hired the man a year ago and he had proved to be entirely disappointing thus far. He needed to replace him. No one immediately came to mind and with a sigh, he set the report aside to be dealt with later.

Lunch came and went before he finished early in the afternoon. He set aside the last sheaf of parchment happily. Now that business was out of the way, he could focus on pleasure.

He had a seduction to plan.

*****

Draco Apparated to the club at half ten. Early enough to enjoy a few drinks before the masses descended, late enough to make a statement. He hadn’t been to this particular club before, but he’d been to many like it. He walked up to the door and used his wand to open it. Once inside, people parted before him as he strode up to the front of the line. The stares he received were entirely because of his name and his looks; he’d tucked away his wings for the evening. He’d chosen his outfit carefully this evening to highlight all of his best features and apparently, it had worked. The bouncer took one look at him and bowed him past. The coat witch in the next room took his outer robes and then directed him up a small hidden stairwell.
The stairwell, like everything else he’d seen of the club, was completely black, illuminated only by small witch lights. The door of the top of the stairs opened into a luxurious office, where Blaise sat on a white couch near a bank of windows.

Blaise looked up at his entrance. “Evening, Draco.”

Draco looked around and then raised his eyebrow in question.

Blaise smirked. “Did I forget to mention? I own this place.”

Draco went over and took a seat on the couch opposite Blaise. “It’s nice.” He glanced down at the dance floor through the window. “Busy.”

“Business is good.” Blaise raised his tumbler. “Drink?”

“Yes, please.” Blaise Summoned a glass and poured Draco a drink from the decanter sitting on the table between them. He offered it to Draco, who took it and then saluted Blaise.

“What are we drinking to this evening?” Blaise asked, swirling the amber liquid.

“To success,” Draco drawled.

Blaise smiled, raising his glass. “To success.”

They clinked their glasses.

Draco took a sip and felt the warming effects of Firewhisky fill him from toes to crown. They sat in silence for a moment before Draco looked over at Blaise, who was staring down at the dance floor below. “Is your witch here yet?”

Blaise nodded. “She arrived over an hour ago. She and her friends are in one of the rooms upstairs. My treat.”

“How magnanimous of you.”

Blaise slid his glance over to Draco. “She had a very interesting friend with her.”

“Oh?” Draco took another sip of Firewhisky.

“Indeed. It seems as though Miss Granger has decided to patronize my club this evening.”

The Veela leaped to attention in Draco’s mind and he had to exercise a great deal of restraint to keep his wings from exploding out of his back. “Is that so?” Draco choked out.

“She looked particularly…mouthwatering, tonight.”

Mine! Draco glared at him murderously.

Blaise grinned. “You’ve got it bad.”

Draco scowled, rolling his shoulders to ease the tension there. “Well it’s not exactly voluntary.”

“Would you change it?” Blaise asked idly. “If you could?”

No! Mine! My mates! Mine! Draco forced himself to think beyond the instinctive reaction of his Veela. While he wasn’t particularly pleased about being forced into mating with them, they were far
from being the least appealing candidates. If he were honest with himself, something he rarely strove to be, he’d found them interesting long before his transformation. “No, I don’t think so.”

“Interesting. Well, in that case, let’s go find your mate, shall we?” Blaise downed the rest of his drink.

Draco finished the last swallow in his glass and then stood.

He followed Blaise down the stairs and to the bar at one end of the large room which held the dance floor. They both ordered drinks, which were delivered promptly. Blaise got another Firewhisky. Draco ordered a Silver Sickle. When he turned away from the bar, his gaze was immediately drawn up to one of the large windows that lined the second floor. A gaggle of witches were very nearly pressed against the glass, but his attention was focused solely on a certain curly-haired brunette hanging back from the group. He made eye contact with her. He could feel his Veela take hold and only the barest remnant of control kept his wings from unfurling.

He took a slow sip of his drink, never taking his gaze from her. She was wide-eyed and he had to agree with Blaise’s assessment. She did indeed look mouthwatering. I want to take her to bed and stay there for the rest of eternity. He could see himself peeling off her dress and kissing and licking his way down her body. I want to taste every inch of her. When he lowered his drink, a single drop hung on his lip. His Veela had already formed a connection with her mind, and when he licked his lip, he could see when she felt it by the jerk of her shoulders. She brought a hand up to touch her lip. He winked.

Oh yes. You’re mine.

Chapter End Notes

Read/comment/review!
Hermione stared down at Malfoy, shocked. He winked at her. The nerve! She jerked her hand down when she realized she still had it pressed to her lip. She turned her attention away from the window to talk to one of her friends, only to realize that they were still pressed against the glass, exclaiming over Malfoy.

“Do you think he’s single?” Parvati asked breathlessly.

“I heard he’s dating Daphne Greengrass,” Katie said.

“I heard he was dating you, Astoria,” Padma said, looking at the shy little blonde.

“I thought he was with Pansy Parkinson?” Astoria replied, blushing.

“Why does it matter?” Hermione muttered angrily.

Ginny, the person standing nearest to her, looked at Hermione in surprise. “Have you looked at him? He’s bloody gorgeous. If I weren’t dating someone equally handsome I’d snatch him up in an instant.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “It’s Malfoy.” Although, he is pretty bloody gorgeous. Her gaze was drawn back to the window, where she could see Malfoy still standing there. He was talking to someone beside him. She hadn’t noticed him with anyone before, but her attention had been otherwise occupied. She nearly touched her lip again. It was a figment of your imagination. Nothing more. Absolutely nothing.

As if sensing her gaze, Malfoy looked up. He raised an eyebrow and smirked at her before turning his attention back to his companion.

Hermione huffed out a breath before purposely turning away from the window again.

“Yeah, but it’s Malfoy,” Ginny said, apparently unwilling to let it drop.

“So?” Hermione went and sat down on the nearest couch. Ginny followed her and sat beside her.
“Well he was a right git in school, it’s true. Now?” Ginny licked her lips lasciviously. “He’s one of wizarding Britain’s most eligible bachelors.”

“It’s true!” Parvati put in. “He was on the cover of Witch Weekly a couple of months ago.”

Ginny leaned over to whisper in Hermione’s ear. “If you’re not interested in Harry, you should go for Malfoy.”

When Hermione stared at her incredulously, Ginny grinned.

“That’s ridiculous.”

Ginny just kept grinning.

“What’s ridiculous?” Katie asked, coming to join their conversation.

“Nothing,” Hermione said firmly, glaring at Ginny.

“I was just saying how Hermione and Malfoy would make a great couple,” Ginny said, unaffected.

Parvati clapped her hands. “You’re right!”


“He’s handsome, clever, rich, and wicked smart,” Angelina said, settling on the opposite couch with Katie and Cho.

“He’s quite nice now, too,” Astoria added, sitting on the other side of Ginny.

“You would actually make a good match,” Katie put in.

Hermione threw her hands up. “What is this? A conspiracy? I am so not interested in Malfoy. Not even a little bit.”

Ginny laughed. “Not hardly,” she said, patting Hermione’s knee.

“Their threads are intertwined,” Luna said, still standing.

“See!” Ginny said triumphantly, pointing at Luna.

Hermione rolled her eyes again. “That’s nonsense.” Didn’t she say that about Harry and Malfoy too?

“No wait! What do you mean, Luna?” Parvati demanded.

“The time isn’t yet,” Luna said, staring off toward the door.

Parvati gasped. “That means the time is coming!”

“It doesn’t mean anything,” Hermione stated, crossing her arms.

A knock on the door interrupted whatever retort Parvati was about to make.

Luna went and opened the door, revealing Harry, Neville, Seamus, Dean, George, and Ron and Lavender.

“Boys!” Ginny cried as Luna opened the door wide, letting them all into the room.
Angelina transformed two of the chairs into couches. They all settled again, Harry perched on the arm of the couch Hermione was sitting on and Neville perched on the arm of the other. Seamus ordered several bottles of Firewhisky and greetings were exchanged while everyone waited for them to be delivered. When they arrived Dean poured everyone drinks.

“To old friends!” Dean said, raising his glass.

“To new friends,” Cho said, saluting Astoria.

“Cheers!” everyone said, clinking glasses.

After several more shots, the volume had grown louder and everyone had grown rowdier. George was having a loud argument with Dean and Seamus about Irish import laws, Angelina, Katie, and Ginny were having an enthusiastic debate about Quidditch, Cho and Astoria were discussing fundraising for the orphans’ home with Neville, Padma, Parvati, and Luna were discussing the various uses of herbs in divination, and Ron and Lavender were snogging in a corner. Hermione turned away from the latter sight, grimacing.

“Bit revolting,” Harry commented from his spot beside her.

“They’re very…enthusiastic,” Hermione replied.

“Dodged a bullet there,” Harry said under his breath to her.

Hermione laughed. “You’re right about that.”

“No regrets, then?”

Hermione shook her head, still smiling. “Not even close.”

Harry glanced over at them. “I hear Lavender is pregnant again.”

“Oh?” Hermione glanced over at them again. “Doesn’t surprise me, I suppose.” She hadn’t heard, but she avoided hearing gossip about her former boyfriend.

“Their third,” Harry said, shaking his head.

“They seem happy,” Hermione said, somewhat wistfully. Maybe I should think about dating again. Ginny would be pleased.

Harry looked at her in concern. “You okay?”

Hermione sighed, her lips quirking. “Yeah.”

“When was the last time you had a date?” Harry asked.

Hermione raised her eyebrows. “You sound like Ginny.”

Harry ran a hand through his hair. “Well, you know, we did date for four years. Something was bound to rub off. But she has a point; it has been a while since you’ve dated anyone.”

“Since when is everyone so interested in my dating life?” Hermione demanded, only half joking.

“Hey! Just a question. Besides, I want you to be happy.” Harry smiled earnestly at her.

“I can be happy without dating someone,” Hermione said grumpily.
“I know that. But you don’t seem happy.”

“You’ve mentioned that.” Hermione took a large drink of Firewhisky, grimacing at the burn.

Harry’s eyebrows flew up, his eyes flicking between her and the glass. “And my opinion hasn’t changed. You deserve to be happy.”

*He really is sweet. He’d make a good boyfriend. For someone. Not me. Definitely not me.* Hermione laughed uncomfortably. “Well I’m not looking to date right now.”

“Why not?”

“Uh…” Hermione scrabbled for a reason.

Harry grinned, leaning closer. Hermione couldn’t help but notice how green his eyes were. How attractive he’d become. How kissable his lips looked. *Fuck.*

“I’m seeing someone,” Hermione finally spit out.

“You’re a terrible liar,” Harry said, still grinning.

“I’m too busy?”

“Try again.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Fine. There’s just no one I’m interested in.”

Harry cocked his head. “You’re still a terrible liar.”

Hermione blushed and took another drink of Firewhisky, avoiding responding.

“Who is it?”

*You. Malfoy. No!* Hermione coughed. “Nobody. I told you, I’m not looking to date right now.”

Harry narrowed his eyes. “You would make a terrible criminal.”

Hermione huffed out a breath. “Forget it, Harry.”

Harry leaned back. “Maybe I’ll just sic Ginny on you.”

Hermione glared at him. “You wouldn’t.”

Harry looked at her, the picture of innocence. “I would.”

“You are evil, Harry Potter.”

There was another knock on the door, the sound almost lost underneath the noise. Apparently Ginny had been expecting it, because she rushed to open the door.

“Blaise! You’re here!” Ginny threw her arms around one of the people standing in the doorway, who Hermione could now see was Blaise, though she barely recognized him from school. The other person with him was still in shadow, but Hermione knew it was Malfoy. She wasn’t sure how, but she absolutely knew it was him. When they both stepped into the room, she could see she’d been right.

*Bloody hell! Why is he here?*
Ginny stepped back, but Blaise left an arm around her shoulders as they walked into the room.

“Everyone, this is my boyfriend, Blaise,” Ginny announced proudly, everyone’s attention turning towards them.

Hermione blinked in surprise. That wasn’t who Hermione had been expecting when Ginny had told her she was seeing someone, but Ginny looked very happy and pleased. Parvati and Lavender cheered while everyone else offered congratulations of varying degrees of inebriation.

As people settled back into their conversations, Hermione was uncomfortably aware that Malfoy was staring. He was subtle about it and she never actually saw him staring. Every time she glanced over, he was deep in conversation with Blaise and Neville. Still, she could feel his eyes on her.

“If you keep looking over your shoulder at Malfoy, you’re going to get a crick in your neck,” Harry told her, clearly amused.

“He’s staring at me,” she said defensively, crossing her legs.

His eyes darted down to her legs, which were mostly bared by the short dress. “If you say so,” Harry said, his lips quirking.

“I do,” Hermione retorted, feeling oddly pleased. Why am I pleased about Harry ogling my legs?

“Well if you want to get out of his sight, do you want to go dance?” Harry said, rubbing one hand through his hair and holding the other out to her.

Hermione stared at it and all she could think of were Ginny’s words about liking him. Sure he’s attractive, but I just think of him like a brother. He’s offering to dance with me like a brother. That’s all.

She took his hand. “Sure, that sounds nice.”

He grinned. “Great.

He stood and then helped her up. She felt two pairs of eyes on her as she smoothed her dress down.

Luna spotted them as they were walking to the door. “Going to dance?”

“Er, yes,” Harry said, looking mildly embarrassed.

But Luna only said, “Have fun,” before drifting off to join Cho and Katie’s conversation.

Harry shrugged at her, smiling slightly, before leading her out the door and downstairs.

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Hermione let Harry lead her onto the dance floor. She’d danced with Harry before, of course – at Bill and Fleur’s wedding, in the tent that time while on the run, at various Ministry functions since the war ended – but never like this.

It was after eleven and the dance floor was crowded. They wormed their way into the center. The darkness interrupted by colored lights, the deep throb of the bass, the witch lights that flashed into existence and then out again just as quickly, and the fog that seemed to twist around their feet with a life of its own made it seem as though they’d entered a different world. A world where maybe it was okay to be attracted to her best friend.
Harry pulled her in close, his hands on her waist. Without thinking she slid her arms onto his shoulders and then around his neck. Although she’d never thought him clumsy, it quickly became clear that he was a very good dancer. He moved his hips against her, encouraging her to loosen up. She let her tension drift away and quickly forgot that they were surrounded people. He stared into her eyes and she found she couldn’t look away. He ground his hips into her and she was less surprised than she expected when she realized that he was hard against her.

Her fingers tangled in his hair and he pulled her even closer, his hands slipping down to her hips. She was mesmerized by the way the lights illuminated his eyes, the play of color on his face, and the way his skin glowed with a light sheen of sweat. It was hot, surrounded by the press of bodies, but Hermione was fairly certain that that wasn’t the reason her skin was flushed. She bit her lip and decided not to question it too much.

She wasn’t sure how long they’d been dancing or how many songs had played. They all seemed to blend into each other, Harry’s hands the only constant.

She jerked when she felt another pair of hands slide onto her waist. Lips brushed her ear.

“Mind if I join?” the voice whispered.

Malfoy? Hermione stared up at Harry, but he was looking behind her with an eyebrow raised.

She tried to turn her head but those lips brushed against her ear again.

“Just enjoy the music, Granger,” he said. She wasn’t sure how he made her last name sound so intimate.

She shivered, which only served to cause Malfoy to move closer to her. Harry finally looked down at her and then gave a small shrug and smiled at her. He’s okay with sharing me…with Malfoy? I’m okay being shared? Why does this feel so good? She pushed the confusing questions out of her mind.

They found a rhythm and Hermione quickly lost her bearings again. The fog and the lights and the feel of two bodies pressed against her was intoxicating in a way that had nothing to do with alcohol. Her head fell back against Malfoy’s – Draco’s – shoulder. If he’s grinding against me, I might as well think of him by his first name. He took the opportunity to nip at her collarbone, causing her to gasp. One of his hands left her waist and then suddenly Harry and Draco were pressed against her as close as they could get.

Hermione opened her eyes and looked at Harry. He was staring at her with what could only be lust filling his eyes.

“He wants you,” Draco said in that maddeningly soft voice that was like a caress against her skin. He must know what it does to people. To me.

Hermione shook her head as much as she could considering his temple was resting against hers.

“No, he doesn’t,” she whispered back.

“If you’re so sure, ask him,” Draco taunted.

That seemed like a bad idea, but her head was fuzzy and it seemed like the night to consider impossible things, so she leaned forward, pressing her chest to Harry’s.

“Do you…want me?” she asked, voice trembling.
When he didn’t immediately respond, she flushed bright red. Of course he doesn’t. Draco’s just getting in your head. And why do I want him to want me? He’s like a brother! A really, really attractive brother. To whom I’m not related. A really good friend! Who’s…no!

She tried to pull away, but Draco held her there, pressed between them.

“You want her, don’t you, Potter?” Draco said in that silky voice, just loud enough for all three of them to hear.

After another moment of hesitation, Harry let out a shaky breath. “Yes,” he said, squeezing Hermione’s hip.

“Then you should have her,” Draco said in a voice like Firewhisky. “She wants you, too.”

Harry stared hard at her. “Do you, Hermione?” And his voice wasn’t shaky anymore.

“I…I…” She couldn’t seem to string together a coherent thought. I do. Merlin, I want you. Both of you.

“Maybe she needs some convincing, Potter,” Draco said lowly, grinding his hips against her, causing her to grind into Harry.

Harry grinned at her in a way that wasn’t entirely reassuring before his lips descended on hers. If her thoughts were scattered before, now they were blown away by the heat of Harry’s mouth and the surge of lust that rose up, almost choking in its intensity. Her eyes closed, unable to stay open with the onslaught of feeling.

Her fingers tightened on his hair and he groaned. His tongue started tracing her lower lip and she parted her lips, letting it slip inside. Even as their tongues tangled and she pressed herself up against his chest, standing on tiptoe, she was aware of the heat of Draco against her back. Both his hands were back on her waist and he was gripping tightly. She whimpered into the kiss when she realized that Draco was also hard against her.

Harry tilted his head and deepened the kiss. Hermione gave in and let Harry have control since he seemed to be doing a fantastic job so far. She vaguely wondered how he’d become so bloody brilliant at snogging but the thought drifted away as soon as it materialized. She moaned when one of hands slid into her hair and tightened, angling her head.

After what could have been an eternity or thirty seconds, Harry drew back slowly, leaving her lips tingling. She was breathless and Harry didn’t seem to be much better. A drop of sweat had gathered at his temple, his cheeks were flushed, and his eyes glittered.

“I’ve wanted to do that for ages,” he murmured after a moment, voice low and husky.

“Have you?” Hermione asked unsteadily. She wasn’t sure any part of her was steady right now.

“Merlin Hermione, you have no idea.”

He leaned in and kissed her again, harder, hotter. She was pressed back into Draco, whose hands were still tight on her waist. Her head fit underneath his chin and he didn’t seem at all bothered that she and Harry were snogging against him.

When Harry drew away this time, he was breathing harshly and his fingers were flexing sporadically on her hips. They’d almost completely given up on dancing except for the grinding of their hips. It was Draco who urged them back into movement, using his grip on Hermione to have her sliding her
hips against both of them.

She felt Draco’s breath against her temple again.

“Do you believe me now?” he drawled.

Hermione couldn’t quite get her breath to respond.

“I bet he wants to take you to bed right now. Probably would if we weren’t in public. Maybe he wants it so much he’ll pull you into a dark corner and take you against one of these walls with only a privacy charm. Do you want that Potter? To have her here, against a wall?” He hadn’t raised his voice at all to address Harry and Hermione realized that Harry had heard everything Draco had said.

Hermione flushed dark red, although she wasn’t sure why she was blushing now. Still, the reminder that they were in public, and that Ginny had probably been watching everything from above effectively shook her out of the daze she’d been in since they’d stepped onto the dance floor. *What on earth am I doing?*

She jerked out of their hold. Harry released her in surprise, but she had the feeling that Draco had let her go.

She stared at both of them for a moment, breathing heavily, before turning and pushing her way out of the crowd. She walked quickly down the hall past the line of people waiting to get inside, and then nearly tumbled outside. She took a deep breath of the cold air and then Apparated away.

Chapter End Notes

Read/rate/review please!
Chapter Summary

Harry wanted her. And him.

Chapter Notes

This chapter took longer to get written because life is crazy. Sorry about that! So much love to everyone who read/commented/left kudos!

I decided to do a lot of what happened last chapter from Harry's point of view in this chapter. This is an important moment and it's fun to explore from all the characters' points of view. Some people may not like that, so please let me know! I may write part of this chapter from Draco's POV, because getting inside Draco's head is just so much fun ;) Let me know what you guys think of that! Do you want to hear what each character is thinking? I may start combining points of view in a single chapter in order to move the plot along faster, but I'd love to hear you guys' thoughts on that!

On Friday night, Harry knocked on the door the coat witch downstairs had directed him to. He’d managed to gather together a few of the boys and after a few drinks at Harry’s beforehand they’d Apparated over to the club Ginny had told him about.

After a moment the door was opened by Luna wearing a sparkly purple dress.

“Hello, Harry,” she said, smiling brightly.

He stepped inside. “Hey, Luna.”

Ginny spotted them from across the room. “Boys!” she shouted, grinning widely from her spot sitting next to Hermione.

Harry led the group behind him in. Angelina turned a couple chairs into couches and they all sat down. He chose a seat next to Hermione, wanting to talk to her about the case, but he lost his train of thought when he saw the dress she was wearing. He hadn’t thought she owned anything like…that. I bet it’s Ginny’s. She had her legs crossed and even though he seriously doubted it was her intention, the position revealed a lot more of her legs than he thought he’d ever seen. Merlin’s beard, when did she get so gorgeous?

Somehow he managed to make conversation without tripping over his own tongue. While they talked, he looked around the room. Noticing all the couples, he realized that he and Hermione were some of the last to settle down of their Hogwarts friends. They weren’t old, certainly not by wizarding standards, but they were all adults now. He knew that a lot of the relationships after the war had been driven by the heady feeling of freedom. It had even driven Hermione and Ron’s ill-fated romance. He was perversely pleased that, unlike many of the relationships around the room, it
hadn’t worked out. *Only because it was easy to see they weren’t suited for each other. Not because I’m interested.*

They talked for a while before Hermione was distracted by something over his shoulder. When he glanced behind him, he understood. Ron was slobbering all over Lavender, both of them clearly intoxicated.

While he commiserated with Hermione over Ron and Lavender’s far-too-public display, he considered her.

“When was the last time you had a date?” he asked.

Hermione looked surprised at his question. “You sound like Ginny.”

Harry ran a hand through his hair. “Well, you know, we did date for four years. Something was bound to rub off. But she has a point; it has been a while since you’ve dated anyone.” *And why is that?*

“Since when is everyone so interested in my dating life?” Hermione demanded crossly.

“Hey! Just a question. Besides, I want you to be happy.” *Just not with Ron. Or Anthony.* Harry smiled earnestly at her, hoping to put her at ease.

“I can be happy without dating someone,” Hermione said grumpily, uncrossing her legs.

Harry looked at her evenly, keeping his gaze away from her legs. “I know that. But you don’t seem happy.”

“You’ve mentioned that.” Hermione took a large drink of Firewhisky, grimacing.

Harry’s eyebrows flew up, his eyes flicking between her and the glass. Hermione normally wasn’t one for Firewhiskey. “And my opinion hasn’t changed. You deserve to be happy.”

Hermione laughed uncomfortably, fiddling with her glass. “Well I’m not looking to date right now.”

“Why not?” he asked, more than a little curious.

“Oh…”

*Could Ginny have been right? Could she…like me? Do I like her?* Harry grinned and leaned closer.

“This could be fun.

“I’m seeing someone,” Hermione finally spit out.

Harry watched as her eyes darted away. “You’re a terrible liar.”

“I’m too busy?”

“Try again.” Harry took a sip of his drink to hide the smile that he could feel threatening.

Hermione rolled her eyes. *I wonder if she knows she picked that up from me?* She looked over his shoulder. “Fine. There’s just no one I’m interested in.”

Harry cocked his head. “You’re still a terrible liar.”

Hermione blushed and took another drink of Firewhisky. She was adorable when she was
embarrassed.

“Who is it?” he pressed. *Fuck it. Please be me.*

Hermione coughed. “Nobody. I told you, I’m not looking to date right now.”

“You would make a terrible criminal,” he informed her.

Hermione huffed out a breath. “Forget it, Harry.”

*Check.* “Maybe I’ll just sic Ginny on you.”

Hermione glared at him. “You wouldn’t.”

*Checkmate.* “I would.”

“You are evil, Harry Potter.”

Harry was about to respond when he heard a knock on the door, muffled by the noise of Dean and Seamus’s argument. He turned to look at the door, his hand falling to his wand, tucked in the pocket of his jeans. He sincerely doubted it was anyone dangerous, but you could never be too careful, especially with this many potential targets in a room.

Ginny hopped up and ran to the door as fast as her very high heels allowed. She threw open the door and engulfed whoever was on the other side in a massive hug. When she stepped back, he grimaced wryly. *Anyone dangerous indeed.* He would have recognized Blaise from school, but he’d also seen a recent photograph at the DMLE’s biannual review of all open Auror files. Blaise, with his known connections to Dark wizards, had an open file, and all open files included photographs.

He didn’t need a photograph to recognize the man with Blaise. It was a surprise to see Malfoy in public, but Malfoy appeared as at ease here as he had standing on the bed in the Ministry safe house. Harry knew he’d been keeping a low profile since his abduction. His wings were nowhere to be seen, and he wondered how that was possible. *A glamor? But why hide them? And why is he here?*

Ginny introduced Blaise as her boyfriend, looking extremely pleased with herself. Harry didn’t know Blaise well, but Ginny seemed genuinely happy and Blaise hadn’t made any trouble since the war, so he offered them congratulations.

Despite the fact that he was hanging back, letting Blaise and Ginny have their moment, Malfoy drew Harry’s gaze. He was dressed in ridiculously well-fitting black robes, his hair combed neatly, hands tucked in his pockets, his demeanor radiating style and sex. *Why am I thinking about how sexy Malfoy looks? He’s a git.* A git who looked even more attractive than he’d looked in Harry’s office earlier that week. *I am not attracted to Malfoy.*

Harry kept half an eye on Malfoy even as he went back to chatting with Hermione. Because of that, he saw Malfoy glance over more than once; when Malfoy saw that he’d seen he only raised an eyebrow and smirked. Harry returned his attention to Hermione, somewhat disconcerted.

For the fifth or so time, Hermione whipped her head around only to just miss Malfoy staring at her. It probably shouldn’t have been as funny as it was, but the growing look of annoyance and the little wrinkled between her eyebrows was just so *cute.* He teased her about her preoccupation and she glared at him, crossing her legs and huffing.

He couldn’t help but notice again how gorgeous her legs looked.
When he looked up, she was staring at him. At first he was embarrassed to be caught staring until he realized that she was blushing. *Could she really be interested?* Ginny’s words echoed through his head again. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Ginny, standing with Katie and Angelina, looking smug as she glanced at them. He decided he might as well test the waters.

He used her clear irritation as an excuse.

“Well if you want to get out of his sight, do you want to go dance?” Harry said, rubbing one hand through his hair and offering his other to her. He was more than a little nervous even though he was pretty sure she’d agree, even if it was just to get out of Malfoy’s sight.

After a moment, she took his hand, looking a tiny bit uncertain. “Sure, that sounds nice.”

He grinned. *Yes! “Great.”*

Hermione stood up and started smoothing her dress down. He couldn’t help but stare. She looked absolutely amazing. He’d have to thank Ginny, whom he was absolutely certain was behind the dress. Malfoy was also staring at her, but oddly it didn’t bother him to see Malfoy ogling Hermione. *Surely that’s odd?* He put the thought out of his mind, unwilling to examine it further.

When she was finished arranging her dress, he took her hand again. As he maneuvered around clumps of people toward the door, he was glad that most of them were too drunk or preoccupied to notice them going. The only exceptions were two blonds. Luna stopped them by the door, but just told them to have fun. She smiled at him almost gleefully before turning away.

He was fairly certain that he could feel Malfoy’s eyes on him as they left.

Downstairs, he pushed into the center of the crowd on the dance floor. He could feel that Hermione was tense from how tight she was holding onto his hand. He knew she didn’t go out very often, but she’d seemed to be having a good time that night. He figured that, paradoxically, being surrounded by strangers might help her relax. She could let loose without fear of embarrassing herself in front of people she knew.

When he thought they were deep enough in the crowd, he pulled her into him and put his hands on her waist. They wanted to slip lower but he didn’t want to push her. Her hands slid onto his shoulders and around his neck, which seemed like a good sign, but when she just stood there stiffly, staring up at him, he decided to coax her into action.

She seemed to loosen up once they started dancing. She leaned into his movements and he could feel himself reacting to her heat. He let himself sink into the feeling of holding her, dancing with her. It was hot and crowded and loud but he didn’t think he’d ever felt so in tune with anyone. He looked into her eyes as his hands slid down to her hips and he pulled her close. Her lips parted and he could see her chest rise as she gasped. He didn’t think he’d ever seen anything sexier.

*Merlin’s balls, I want to take her to bed right now.* The realization that he desperately wanted to sleep with his best friend of more than a decade wasn’t as startling as he might have expected.

Although he was mostly focused on the feel of Hermione in his arms, years as an Auror had him paying attention to the mass of people surrounding them. For some reason, Harry was entirely unsurprised when he spotted a pale blond head moving easily through the crowd towards them. Malfoy was taller than most of the people dancing around them and his distinctive hair was easy to see in the dark room. Harry watched as he insinuated himself behind Hermione, who was entirely
oblivious to his approach. Harry felt the brush of Malfoy’s fingers as Malfoy settled his hands on Hermione’s waist, just above where Harry had his hands on her hips.

Hermione jerked in surprise and Malfoy leaned down to whisper in her ear, never breaking eye contact with him. Whatever he said, lost in the noise, caused Hermione to look up at him. Harry waited for some feeling of annoyance or jealousy, even anger, at Malfoy’s presence and felt nothing except a strange warmth in his chest that nearly matched the heat in his groin.

Finally Harry looked down at Hermione, who was staring up at him in bewilderment. He shrugged slightly and then looked up at Malfoy again, who was smirking. Harry quirked a brow and Malfoy settled himself more firmly against Hermione, pushing all of them closer together. Harry nearly groaned at the feeling.

As they started dancing again, Malfoy fitting surprisingly well into the rhythm they’d established earlier, Harry alternated between looking at Hermione and Malfoy.

If possible, Hermione was even more breathless than she had been before. Her head had fallen back against Draco’s shoulder, her curls spreading across his chest.

Malfoy looked sinful. He stood almost a full head taller than Hermione, even with her heels, and a wicked smirk graced his face. It was completed by the look in his eyes that was all heat and need and lust.

He wasn’t sure what look was in his own eyes, but suddenly Malfoy grinned and then there was a hand on his hip. He didn’t need to check that Hermione’s hands were still on his shoulders, her fingers brushing against the hair at the nape of his neck, to know that the hand belonged to Malfoy. Long fingers wrapped around his hip and pulled him toward Hermione with a surprisingly strong grip. It had the immediate effect of causing Hermione to gasp and Malfoy’s grin to grow even wider. Both of those things went straight to his cock.

Hermione looked up at him and he all he could do was look at her helplessly. Merlin, I want you to want me as much I want you. Surely she had to be at least a little attracted to him, to be grinding her hips against him the way she was.

As Harry struggled valiantly to keep his gaze from falling to her heaving chest, he saw Malfoy lean down to whisper in Hermione’s ear. She licked her lip and then bit it.

She took a deep breath. “Do you…want me?” she asked uncertainly.

Harry almost stopped breathing. You have to ask? Despite what certain portions of his anatomy were insisting, he hesitated. What if this ruins our friendship? What if she doesn’t want anything more than tonight?

She drew back slightly, face red, and the panic at her withdrawal convinced him that he did want her. Want this. Desperately.

“You want her, don’t you, Potter?” Malfoy murmured, mirroring his thoughts, just loud enough to be heard over the music. His voice sounded like sex.

He wanted to run a hand through his hair, but he wanted to keep holding Hermione more. Fuck it. Harry let out a shaky breath.


“Then you should have her. She wants you, too.” How Malfoy managed to sound like he was
whispering to them in bed despite being in the middle of a crowded club, Harry would never know.

Then his brain stalled out as he registered Malfoy’s words. *She wants me? Is Malfoy just saying that?* But Malfoy’s eyes were still filled with lust, and his grip was still firm on Harry’s hip.

Harry looked at Hermione, trying to see into her thoughts. What he saw in her eyes comforted him. She was just as aroused as he was. “Do you, Hermione?"

“I…I…”

“Maybe she needs some convincing, Potter,” Malfoy drawled.

Hermione’s hips pressed into him and she was staring up at him and Harry grinned. *I can do that.*

Snogging Hermione was the best feeling in the world. Her delicate fingers tangling in his hair, tugging, pulled a groan from deep in his chest. The club faded away and the only thing that mattered was Hermione and it felt *so right.* Except it wasn’t just Hermione. Harry was intimately aware of Malfoy’s presence. At some point, Malfoy’s hand had left his hip and Harry found himself missing its warmth and strength. Their fingers brushed as they held Hermione between them, and sparks seemed to flow up his arms from those slight points of contact. He slid one hand into Hermione’s hair to tilt her head for a better angle and then *Merlin* it was perfect. Better than any dream or fantasy he’d ever had.

Eventually he drew back when he felt he’d gotten enough of a taste of Hermione. She was panting and he could feel sweat forming on his forehead. It wasn’t just the heat of the club. He wanted to take Hermione home right now and the restraint necessary to keep from ravaging her in the middle of the club was only just within his limits.

He caught his breath and then couldn’t help but say, “I’ve wanted to do that for ages.” His voice sounded as rough as he felt.

“Have you?” She looked dazed.

He breathed out a laugh. “Merlin, Hermione, you have no idea.”

He leaned down and kissed her again, pressing into her. He could feel when she was pressed as close to Malfoy as she could be. The backs of Harry’s hands were brushing against Malfoy’s hard chest. Hermione tasted like sugar and Firewhiskey and she was more intoxicating than anything he’d drunk that evening.

After he pulled back, reluctantly, he could only stare at her. *This* was what he’d been missing. She was all he’d ever really wanted.

When Malfoy started talking, his voice sounding like it was whispered directly into his ear, it only added fuel to the fires raging in his heart and groin, and Harry was both disappointed and relieved when Hermione pulled away before rushing out of the club. If she’d stayed, he might have done exactly what Malfoy had suggested.

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Once Hermione was gone, he was left standing with Malfoy, who was staring at him with a smirk.

“What?” he asked defensively, rubbing a hand through his hair. He had to resist the urge to touch his lips and see if he could feel Hermione. To see if there was proof that he’d just snogged his friend in the middle of a club.
Malfoy took a step forward into Harry’s personal space. “I’m surprised you and Granger hadn’t done that before.”

Harry shoved his hands into his pockets. “Don’t know what you mean.”

Malfoy only smirked harder. “It’s like getting a whiff of Amortentia. You suddenly discover exactly what it is you’ve always wanted.” He leaned forward, his lips right by Harry’s ear. “What you’ve always needed.”

Harry took a shuddering breath. Before he could come up with a response, Malfoy was walking away. Harry stared after him. He was leaving? After saying that? But Malfoy glanced back at him with one eyebrow raised. He cocked his head forward and Harry was following him before he made a conscious decision to do so.

Harry only just managed to keep up as Malfoy easily maneuvered through the writhing bodies. Just when Harry thought he’d lost him, he spotted a dark hallway that was very nearly invisible against the black walls. Only a very dim line of lights down the center of the hallway distinguished it. Harry walked down the empty hallway several meters until he spotted Malfoy leaning against the wall.

Harry walked up to him, his hand twitching toward his wand. He didn’t think Malfoy would attack him, but he couldn’t be too careful. When Harry came to a stop in front of him, Malfoy didn’t say anything.

“Well?” Harry demanded. He was feeling vaguely disconcerted for a reason he couldn’t put a finger on.

Malfoy didn’t answer for a moment. Then, instead of answering, he grabbed Harry’s shirt, shoved him back against the wall, crowded against him, and pressed his lips against Harry’s.

Shock kept Harry still for a moment before he found himself responding aggressively. Malfoy was a bit taller and only just stronger than Harry, and he kept him pinned against the wall as he dragged his lips across Harry’s jaw and then down his throat, the stubble of his cheek rasping slightly. He nipped Harry’s collarbone hard before returning to his lips. Harry groaned and Malfoy took the opportunity to slip his tongue into Harry’s mouth.

This was nothing like kissing Hermione. Malfoy was aggressive and demanding and somehow possessive. He smelled like cedar and Firewhiskey and smoke. He was so different from Hermione but equally intoxicating.

Harry grabbed Malfoy’s hips and pulled him closer. It was easy to tell how aroused Malfoy was. Harry ground their cocks together even as he tangled his tongue with Malfoy’s. Malfoy moaned and tilted his head, biting Harry’s lower lip. Harry returned the favor. Malfoy drew away slightly and then bent his head and nipped the muscle between Harry’s neck and shoulder. Harry shuddered and Malfoy did it again, harder. Harry was pretty sure he’d have a mark the next day, but the thought didn’t bother him.

Malfoy drew back, leaving only his hands, which were wrapped tightly around Harry’s hips.

“Something to think about, Potter,” he murmured.

And then he pulled away completely and walked down the hallway and out of sight.

Harry leaned back against the wall, panting. His hands, his neck, and his lips tingled and he was harder than he’d ever been. What the bloody hell just happened?
Chapter End Notes

As always, please read/comment/kudos!
Draco's ready to move things along.

I am so, so sorry for the delay on this chapter! But absolutely huge thanks to everyone who left comments and kudos on the last chapter, and all my new followers. I'm so glad that you are enjoying this fun little story :D.

I decided to stay with one POV per chapter, if only for my own sake. But also I think it makes everything clearer. I will try to move the plot along a little faster, and I probably won't do a scene from everyone's viewpoints again.

So, I hope you all enjoy Draco's view!

They made it too easy.

Draco had expected it to take more work and no small amount of manipulation on his part to get Granger and Potter together, but they went to dance of their own volition.

Draco had watched as Potter led Granger out of the room, admiring the way they looked together. *Soon I'll have them both.* The thought had him smirking as he turned back to his conversation with Blaise and Longbottom. Blaise had raised an eyebrow, asking a silent question even as he replied to Longbottom’s comment about a recent article in *Potions Monthly*. Draco had just given a small shake of his head in reply.

Draco hadn’t been able to see the dance floor from where he’d been standing, but he could feel Granger and Potter. *Maybe this bloody Veela thing is good for something.* He’d sensed when things started getting interested and his Veela had perked up. Draco had needed a long drink to resist the urge to release his wings and hunt down his mates.

“I was speaking with Professor Sprout and she disagreed with the author about the possible uses of Mandrake root in antivenin. I think she’s right. Mandrake roots are very finicky when used as a substitute in antidotes, especially against hexes—”

Draco had tuned out when it became apparent that Longbottom was going to continue in his longwinded explanation. Besides, he had much better things to be doing.

He’d excused himself with less subtlety than he usually managed. Blaise had glanced at the empty couch and at Draco’s tight grip on his tumbler, smirked, and told him to have fun.

Potter had been oddly unsurprised when Draco turned up, and even more oddly agreeable to Draco.
dancing with Granger. Granger had been surprised, but she hadn’t raised any objections either.

Coaxing Potter into kissing Granger had been child’s play. Gryffindors really were too easy to rile up. Still, he himself had been more than a little riled and aroused by them, and he hadn’t done more than stand there as they snogged against him.

But standing there, surrounded by them, touching them. It was intoxicating. He’d wanted to whisk them away and take them to bed and keep them there for a few days. Or weeks. Hermione was soft and her curves fit against him perfectly as Potter pressed her against him. And Potter. Even in the heavy Auror robes he usually wore, it was easy to see that he was lean, but without them it was clear that he was muscular as well. With the hand Draco had wrapped around his waist he had discovered that Auror training kept Potter very fit indeed.

To have them both, well, his Veela clearly had good taste. *I can live with this.*

When Hermione pulled away from them both, breathing heavily, he was disappointed, but not terribly surprised. She’d looked mildly panicked and he’d let her go without a fight. Which didn’t have anything to do with the fact that he was struggling to get over his own response to having his mates so close. Not at all.

He was surprised when Potter didn’t immediately leave. Just stood there, staring at him. *Well, well. Let’s see if you feel something.*

Draco hadn’t visited the club before, but being a Veela meant he had excellent night vision and he spotted the dark corridor along the wall. He could feel that Potter followed him and he was quite pleased by that.

He walked a little ways into the corridor, which was just barely lit, and struck up a pose against the wall which he knew would display him to his best advantage. Potter caught up quickly, and he stopped a step away and looked at Draco with something between curiosity, arousal, and nerves.

Draco watched as Potter’s hand twitched. *Probably wondering if I’ll hex him.* The thought nearly had him smirking, but that would have ruined the image he was going for. Instead, he waited Potter out, knowing how impatient he was.

He didn’t disappoint.

“Well?” he demanded.

Nerves were starting to become the dominant expression on Potter’s face, and Draco didn’t want that. That, combined with his own need to have Potter, left only one course of action.

Draco grabbed Potter’s shirt, thrust him up against the wall, and then kissed him. He wasn’t going to let Potter rethink this, or think at all.

The angle was perfect, and Draco easily kept control as they kissed. He could feel Potter writhing beneath him, but the Veela gave Draco just enough advantage to keep him pinned against the wall. He dragged himself away from Potter’s lips in order to taste the skin of his neck and the edge of shoulder revealed by Potter’s shirt. He wasn’t entirely sure if it was the Veela in him, but Draco couldn’t help but think that Potter tasted like night skies and brandy.

He returned his attention to Potter’s lips and was extremely pleased when Potter reached around, grabbed Draco’s hips, and pulled Draco closer, grinding their cocks together. When Potter thrust his tongue into Draco’s mouth, he moaned. Draco was nearly mindless. He nipped at Potter’s lip, who bit back, and then Draco nipped at that tantalizing bit of shoulder. Potter moaned and Draco’s Veela
nearly had a meltdown. He did it again, hard enough to leave a mark. *He’s mine. Mine.*

Realizing that he was getting dangerously close to dragging Potter off to bed and damn subtlety, Draco pulled back. Potter stared at him with dilated pupils, the green only just visible. He was panting through reddened and swollen lips. Draco stared at him hungrily for a moment, and then stepped back with a struggle he managed to keep hidden.

“Something to think about Potter,” Draco said, when he was sure his voice wouldn’t tremble.

Then he turned and walked away, resisting the urge to look away and the screeching from his Veela.

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Draco spent most of Sunday deciding how to approach the next phase of his pursuit. He didn’t know Granger and Potter as adults, having spent more time avoiding them since finishing Hogwarts than seeking them out. But, he decided, their personalities probably hadn’t changed appreciably since then. And Draco had spent far more time than he cared to admit studying those two, and the Weasel, in school. He spent some time researching them, looking through old copies of the *Prophet* and *The Quibbler*, a paper he had subscribed to after the war when he was crippled with guilt and self-loathing for everything that had happened that year. He’d also made a very large, anonymous donation.

On Monday morning, armed with his research, he Apparated to the Ministry and made his way confidently to the Department for Magical Creatures. He’d never been there before, but it was easy to find. Even if he hadn’t surreptitiously checked the directory, his Veela could sense his mates within the building and without much effort, he could have located them.

When the lift doors opened, he stepped out into offices that looked very much like all the others in the Ministry, although generally cleaner and better organized. A woman sat at a large desk at the front of the room, facing toward the lift. He approached and the woman looked up with the polite, expectant look all receptionists had mastered. Her expression quickly morphed when she recognized him. Witches and wizards tended to react one of two ways when they met him: either they were disgusted and glared or they flattered and flirted. She fell into the latter category. *Thank Merlin I don’t have my wings out. She’d combust.*

“Mr. Malfoy? How can I help you?” she asked, a little breathlessly.

He leaned forward slightly, a half-smile on his face. “I’m looking for Hermione Granger.”

She tucked a piece of hair behind her ear. “Do you, uh, have an appointment?”

“No. I want to surprise her,” he said, in a voice suggesting he was imparting a great secret. *All the better if she thinks something’s going on.*

“Oh,” she said, eyes widening even more. “Well, let me see if she’s busy.” The woman quickly flipped through a book on her desk and then back up at him. “She doesn’t have a meeting right now, so you can go see her.” She smiled brilliantly.

“Perfect,” Draco said, his voice very nearly syrupy. “Could you direct me to her office?”

“Of course! Last door on the left,” she said, indicating a wall of doors behind her. “I can show you, if you want?”
“Absolutely not. “Oh, that’s alright. I’m sure I can find it.” He winked before striding away.

The door the receptionist had indicated had a small brass plate with Granger’s name embossed on it.

Draco knocked and waited until he heard a muffled, “Come in.”

He pushed open the door, and was inordinately pleased by the surprised look on her face, and the brief flash of lust he thought he saw. He definitely didn’t imagine the blush which rose to her cheeks. Well, well.

“Malfoy! Um, come in, sit down.” She gestured to one of the chairs in front of her desk. He closed the door behind him before going to sit, pleased when he did that the chair was comfortable.

“What can I do for you?” she asked, when he didn’t immediately say anything.

Oh the possibilities. She didn’t appear to realize how suggestive her statement could be, but the blush hadn’t yet left her cheeks. “Well, you did tell me to drop by if I needed help.”

“Of course, I’d be happy to help. Did you need help for anything in particular?” She slipped quickly into a professional mode.

I have a rather large problem in my lap that I’d love for you to help me with. Draco cleared his throat before answering, glad that her desk was high enough to hide his lower half from view. He crossed his legs, just in case. “Well you see, I’m having a problem with my mates.”

“I didn’t know you’d found her. Congratulations. Wait, your…mates? You have more than one?” She looked adorably puzzled.

Draco smirked. “Yes, two, in fact.”

“I’ve read about cases where a Veela had more than one mate, but it’s not terribly common.”

“No, it’s not,” Draco said, enjoying her confusion.

“I see. Do you know why you have two mates? Is it to do with your transformation? Or perhaps your magical signature? Are your mates male or female? I suppose such a thing could be due to personal preference, but of course, there are cases where the Veela found their mate when they were far too young to have developed a preference –”

Draco was sure she could have continued for much longer, but an academic digression wasn’t exactly conducive to his plan to seduce her, even if he was impressed by her ability to store so much information. So he cleared his throat again.

She cut off abruptly and immediately refocused on him, another faint blush tinting her cheekbones. “I’m sorry, I tend to get carried away. But you say you’re having a problem?”

Draco waved off her apology, knowing without a doubt that most of the people she interacted with wouldn’t have the intellectual capacity to follow her and probably grew annoyed quickly. “No need to apologize.”

“Ah, thank you. But tell me what your problem is, and I will see if there’s something I can do to help.” She was looking at him with a hint of something that looked like gratitude.

His Veela shifted restlessly in his mind. She shouldn’t be punished for being smarter than everyone else in the room. People should appreciate her, not denigrate her. The urge to hunt down those who
had instilled in her the belief that she should hide her intelligence was strong, but the draw of her physical presence was stronger.

“Well, I think my mates may be reluctant. I haven’t told them yet, you see. My reputation…suffered because of the war. I’m not sure I want to drag them down.” Draco surprised himself with his honesty. He’d wanted to play on her sympathy, but he hadn’t realized how genuinely worried he was that Potter and Granger would reject him once they realized that he was bound to them.

Granger’s face softened immediately, as he had hoped. “I take it that your mates are not old friends?” Draco shook his head and she looked at him earnestly. “Your reputation really isn’t that bad. I know you’ve donated quite a lot to the recovery efforts, in both time and money. I’m sure that will be worth something.”

Draco raised an eyebrow. “Been keeping tabs on me, have you?”

Hermione coughed, looking down. “I’m very involved, and I do try to keep abreast of all news. And we have, of course, crossed paths now and then.”

“Of course,” Draco said, smirking.

“Anyway, I’m sure your mates will recognize your efforts.” She busied herself adjusting some quills before looking at him.

“I certainly hope so.” Draco stared at her hard, and something that looked suspiciously like heat flared in her eyes.

“So what is it you think I might be able to help with?” she asked, smoothing some parchments on her desk.

“I want to know the laws on Veela courtship. I know there used to be special laws regarding how Veelas could attract their mates, but I was never interested in the details before. Now I have a vested interest, you could say.”

Hermione smiled. “Naturally.” She slid her wand into her hand from somewhere Draco didn’t spot and then waved it, Summoning several books from the shelves that lined the walls. “The laws haven’t changed much. They were relatively lenient, and they still are, for many things. The only law which has changed recently is about the use of allure. It’s recently been classified as a dangerous aphrodisiac and is not allowed to be used without consent.”

“So I can’t use the Veela allure to attract my mates?” Unfortunate, but not crippling.

“Basically. It was considered to be in the same category as some of the more potent love potions, because it essentially removes the will of the victim. Therefore, anything which happens under its influence with someone who is under its thrall unwillingly cannot be consented to. Once your mates have consented however, it may be used at the discretion of the couple, or triad,” she added, nodding at him.

“Allure doesn’t work that way,” Draco said, annoyed that she had implied that he might use the allure to force himself on his mates.

“I know,” Granger admitted. “I understand that it is usually more of a concentrated pheromone, designed to appeal to mates. However, because of those cases where it has been used to coerce someone unwillingly, the laws were made harsher to protect unwilling mates from being forced to submit.”
“I suppose I can understand that,” Draco said grudgingly.

“As far as other courtship traditions and rituals,” Granger said, clearly trying to change the topic, “the laws are quite lenient.” Her tone suggested that she thought them too lenient. “Veela have much more leeway than wizards. Veela may not, under any circumstance, harm their mate. However, Veela are allowed to go so far as to kidnap their mate, although I would strongly recommend against that course of action. I believe that law was created so that a Veela could remove a mate from a family which opposed the match. From what I have read, I believe the Veela courtship ritual is otherwise very similar to that of the traditional pureblood ritual.”

Draco nodded. “It is. Well, that was helpful, thank you.” He smiled at her, letting just a hint of the Veela out.

Her breath caught, before she shook herself. “You’re welcome. I have a book here which covers most points of Veela law, if you’re interested.” She held up a thick book with a red leather cover and *Veela Law* stamped on the cover in large gold letters.

“Yes, thank you.” He reached forward, brushing his fingers against hers intentionally as he took the book. The same sparks that he’d felt in Potter’s office flowed up his arm and he knew she felt it as well. She jerked her arm back and inspected it.

“What was that?” she demanded.

Draco shrugged. “I’ve no idea what you mean.” He stood, shrinking the book and slipping it into his pocket wordlessly. “You’ve been very helpful, Granger. Thank you.” He walked to the door and opened it, before turning at the last moment. “And thank you for the dance on Friday.”

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Draco chuckled to himself as he walked away. The expression on her face had been priceless. His Veela was gratified by the arousal that had shown clearly on her face, even if it had been warring with shock and embarrassment.

As he stepped into the lift, he debated going to see Potter, but he didn’t have a reason, even a flimsy one like he’d given Granger, and he didn’t fancy going into the DMLE without reason. There were more than a few Aurors who weren’t happy that he wasn’t locked up in Azkaban. Instead, he took the lift to the main hall and then Apparated to Diagon Alley.

He walked quickly to Twilfitt and Tattings. He received far fewer glares than he used right after the war, but there were still the occasional disparaging remarks. Thankfully, the walk was uneventful and he was soon entering the store.

He had owled the proprieter, Madame Lemoux, and arranged for private fittings, though he had not explained the situation. With his wings tucked away, as they were now, his regular clothes fit, but he wanted to get robes made that would accommodate his wings when they were out. For obvious reasons, they could not simply be ordered.

When he walked in, he was immediately greeted by a young woman Draco recognized from previous trips to the store.

“Hello, Mr. Malfoy,” she said, smiling. She took his outer robe, leaving him in a well-fitting suit. “Madame will be right out.”

Within moments, a thin older woman walked out of a back room. “Monsieur Malfoy, a pleasure to see you, as always,” she said, her accent thick. “This way.”
She gestured, and he walked into the back room she had emerged from. She followed him and then closed the door, engaging privacy wards.

“Now, what is it you require?” she asked, walking around him. She snapped her fingers and a measuring tape jumped into her hand.

Draco shrugged out of his jacket and laid it on a chair. The shirt beneath had large slits cut in the back which he’d made that morning for precisely this purpose. With a little thought, his wings emerged, slightly tearing the fabric despite the slits. He flexed them, his wing tips brushing the walls. He fluffed them and then tucked them against his back.

“As you can see, I have some new appendages which need to be accommodated.”

Madame Lemoux frowned. “Oui, well. This does present some difficulty, Monsieur.” She didn’t exclaim or fawn. There were more Veela in France, and Draco was gratified to see that his assumption of her discretion was correct.

“I need at least three sets of dress robes, and ten sets of everyday robes.”

Madame hmm’d. She snapped her fingers again and the tape jumped into action, zipping around him and taking measures. At a gesture from Madame, Draco extended his wings and the tape took even more measurements.

“Will you be able to make what I require?” Draco asked.

Madame Lemoux frowned again. “But of course, Monsieur. The color is very striking. There is much I can do.” She walked around him again, studying him and his wings from every angle. “Yes, this will be done.”

“Excellent,” Draco said, retracting his wings when the tape measure returned to her hand.

“Do you have a hurry?” she asked, flicking her fingers and sending the measure away.

“I have an event planned for three weeks from now for which I will need a set of dress robes,” he said as he re-buttoned his shirt. *Well, if all goes well.*

Madame tapped a finger against her lip before nodding sharply. “It can be done. Come back next week for a fitting.”

Draco retrieved his jacket and slipped it back on. “Very well. I trust I can depend on your discretion, Madame?”

Madame stood straighter. “*Naturellement,* Monsieur Malfoy.”

“Good. I will see you next week.” Draco opened the door, disengaging the privacy wards. The assistant was waiting in the main room with his outer robes. He nodded at her as he pulled them on. She stared at him curiously but only offered a cordial goodbye as he left.

When he Apparated back to the Manor, he stopped by his mother’s favorite parlor, finding her alone drinking a cup of tea and reading.

“Hello, Mother,” he said.

She looked up and smiled slightly. “Draco.”
She had been cool since he had revealed the identity of his mates, but he knew she would come around. “I wanted to let you know that I plan to hold a ball in three weeks for Samhain.”

His mother’s reaction was limited to a delicate lift of one eyebrow. “Do you?”

“We used to hold one every year,” he reminded her.

“I remember,” she replied, her tone bland. “We have not held one eight years.”

“I thought it was time to bring it back.”

She set down her cup of tea. “I don’t suppose this has anything to do with your recent inheritance?”

Draco straightened the cuffs of his shirt, admiring the line. “I simply want to uphold tradition.”

“Oh course, dear,” she said. “I’ll owl Daphne, I’m sure she’d love to help plan a Samhain ball.”

His Veela screeched in his head. “I’m sure she would,” he gritted. “Good afternoon.”

His mother smiled slightly and then returned to her book with undisturbed calm. Draco had the feeling, as his wings burst from his back as he walked up the stairs, that he had not emerged the victor in that little verbal contest.

Chapter End Notes

I’d love to hear your thoughts! Read/comment/kudos!
Work

Chapter Summary

Hermione has a much stranger weekend than she expected.

Chapter Notes

Honestly, this was a hard week. After Tuesday, I had very little motivation to write. However, the support that this story has received has meant so much to me. Every comment, every bookmark, every kudos- they inspire me and remind me why I love writing :) So thank you, thank you to everyone who has taken the time to read this little fic of mine. It's actually the first fic I've ever written, and I am so floored by the response. Much, much love to everyone. And remember, love will always trump hate.

Hermione stumbled as she landed in her apartment, her stomach roiling from Apparation as she quickly walked to her bathroom and then dug around in the cabinet until she found the Sober-Up Potion she kept for the rare times she had more than a couple drinks. She downed it and then cast a Tempus charm, waiting the five minutes until it activated. When they’d passed and her stomach was still full of butterflies, she reluctantly had to admit that they weren’t caused by alcohol, but from kissing Harry. And dancing with Malfoy. She blushed at the thought.

She stared at her reflection in the mirror, having yet to leave the bathroom. Even though minutes had passed since leaving the club, well, fleeing might have been a more accurate term, her cheeks were still flushed and she still hadn’t managed to catch her breath. Why on earth did I kiss Harry? And dance with Malfoy? And with Harry and Malfoy at the same time? I must be crazy!

She frowned at her reflection and then set about brushing her teeth and getting ready for bed. When she’d done all that and she still had flutters in her stomach, she stomped into her bedroom, annoyed. She undressed, changed into her most comfortable pajamas, and then tucked herself into bed.

And then she stared at the ceiling. She couldn’t get her mind to stop replaying the dance in her head. When she felt herself start to get wet just from thinking about the way it had felt to be pressed between Harry and Malfoy, she sat up, annoyed. A wave of her hand lit the lamp beside her bed. Crookshanks, who had curled up by her feet, lifted his head long enough to glare at her before settling back down with a distinctly disgruntled expression.

Hermione, refusing to accept that she could possibly be so worked up over a kiss – a fantastic snog that was better than any of the sex you’ve had recently – picked up the book she was currently reading, a treatise on werewolf laws in Romania, and flipped to her current page.

She struggled through two pages before giving up. Normally she would have found it fascinating, but she couldn’t seem to keep her attention on the words and closed the book in annoyance.

She set the book back on her table, muttered Nox, and then slumped back down in bed. Crookshanks shifted himself until he was pressed up against her leg, near enough for her to reach. She patted him
and stared at the ceiling until she finally fell into a restless sleep.

The next morning, her alarm went off far too early. Hermione had managed to get a battery-powered alarm clock to work despite the magical currents which normally kept electricity from functioning, but the only sound it could make was a loud jangling ring. She winced and slapped it to make it quiet down. She rolled over to find Crookshanks staring at her in disapproval. He meowed loudly in her face and then hopped down and sauntered into the kitchen.

She managed to get through her morning routine with a minimum of cursing. This is what you get for not getting enough sleep. She was very glad she’d taken a Sober-Up Potion the night before, because she knew she was out of Hangover Potion. After she ate breakfast, she quickly used magic to wash and dry her dishes before Apparating away.

Hermione appeared at the Apparation point at the end of the drive of the Pax Home for War Orphans. As she walked up the gravel drive, she considered the building. It had started as a manor confiscated from one of the Death Eaters, which Hermione had bought off the Ministry. But Hermione had made so many changes, both to the interior and exterior, that it was nearly unrecognizable. It now had a homey feel even from a distance. When she walked in, she was pleased by how light the foyer was. She had redone all the floors in bamboo except for the foyer, which she had redone in white marble, and enlarged all the windows.

Astoria walked out of a room off the left side of the foyer. She smiled at her, her heels clicking on the floor as she walked up to Hermione and gave her a hug. She didn’t look any the worse for wear for having gone out last night.

“I’m so glad you could come by today,” Astoria said.

Hermione sighed. “I wish I could have come sooner, but work has been so busy.”

Astoria lowered her voice. “Does that have to do with Draco?”

Hermione looked at her quizzically. “How do you know about that?”

“Narcissa invited Daphne and I over last week for luncheon and I noticed Draco’s new… appendages,” Astoria explained delicately.

“Ah. He seems to have gotten control of those,” Hermione said, remembering that he hadn’t had them out at the club the night before. Although he still looked bloody gorgeous.

Astoria nodded. “Yes, I noticed that last night. I’m not surprised. I didn’t know him well in school, but he didn’t seem like the type to enjoy being taken by surprise or out of control.”

That’s for sure. “No, he doesn’t.”

“But you didn’t answer my question. And I didn’t see you leave last night.” Astoria said.

“I didn’t come here to gossip, Astoria,” Hermione said, lightly chiding.

Astoria only smiled. “Of course not, but you can talk while we walk.”

Hermione rolled her eyes and led the way upstairs.

Astoria coughed politely when they were halfway up the staircase and Hermione laughed.

“All I can say is that it may have to do with Draco.” Hermione looked sidelong at Astoria, who
nodded speculatively. “And I left after dancing a couple songs with Harry.” That’s partially true, at least. “Now, tell me how things have been here.”

Astoria smiled brightly. “Phoebe is absolutely wonderful. Everything is running quite smoothly. She’s with the children right now, so I volunteered to work in the office.”

Hermione had hired Phoebe Selwyn, a half-blood whose uncle had fought with Voldemort, as the manager of the home. Phoebe had been raised in Spain and so had been out of the country during the war, but she had been distressed to learn of her family’s involvement with Voldemort. She had been running part of her family’s business, but had applied to work at the home when she saw an article about it in the *Prophet*. Hermione had been more than happy to hire her.

Astoria continued her update. “A lot of the children are missing the ones who just started at Hogwarts; otherwise most of them are doing quite well. Some of them are still quite shy, and Clarissa is still having nightmares, as are some of the older children. Phoebe suggested hiring a full-time counselor for them.”

Hermione nodded. “That’s a good idea.”

They’d reached the second floor and stood outside one of the many doors. It was clearly marked with a sign that read “Art Room” and shrieks and laughter could be heard even from the hallway. Hermione opened the door and was assaulted as soon as she stepped inside.

“Missy Hermy!”

“We missed you!”

Hermione laughed and kneeled down to accept the hugs from the children. Before being promoted two years ago, Hermione had spent much more time at the home, but as head of the department she rarely had time to spend an afternoon, let alone a day, there. She was genuinely pleased to have the time to see the children again.

She accepted the greetings and returned as many hugs as she could. The older children retreated a bit once they’d said hello, but the younger ones clung to her happily.

“How is everyone today?” Hermione asked.

Giggles greeted her question.

“Phe has blue hair!” Nadine, one of the younger girls, exclaimed.

“Rolly made it purple and then blue!” Penelope, an older girl, added.

Hermione looked at Roland, a five-year old, who was sitting on the floor giggling madly.

“It was a accident!” Rolly said. “I tot she’d look funny!”

Hermione laughed and looked up at Phoebe, who had joined them. She did indeed have blue hair, so bright it was nearly neon.

“She does look funny,” Hermione whispered loudly, inciting another round of giggles. Even some of the shyer children were laughing.

“They were supposed to be drawing pictures,” Phoebe said dryly.

“Did you all draw pictures?” Hermione asked.
Lots of nods and more giggling.

“Show me,” Hermione suggested. The two children who had settled on her lap clambered off, allowing her to stand, and then immediately a child grabbed hold of each hand and towed her towards the tables at the other end of the room.

Hermione spent several minutes examining each child’s picture and then joined them for the next activity – finger painting. Hermione had worn old clothes in the expectation of getting a little dirty and was not disappointed. After finger painting she joined the children in playing outside, engaging in a rousing game of ground Quidditch, since most of the children were too young to use broomsticks, and then three games of tag before joining Phoebe, who was supervising from the side. Astoria had returned to the office.

“Fenny,” Hermione called, summoning one of the house elves Hermione employed at the home.

A house elf in a clean set of clothes appeared with a soft crack.

“Yes, Missy Hermy?” she asked in a squeaky voice.

“Would you mind bringing several pitchers of lemonade?”

“Of course, Missy!” The elf Disapparated with another soft crack.

Hermione sat down in a plush chair beside Phoebe. “Any news?”

“Not really,” Phoebe replied. “All the children passed their most recent health check-up. And the home is doing fairly well financially.” Phoebe slanted a glance at her. “Strange how we always receive a very large donation a few days after you review the budget.”

Hermione blinked. “Very strange. But that’s great. So Alexandra recovered from her bout of influenza?”

Phoebe nodded. “The healer was pleased with her progress. It was more difficult to treat since she’s allergic to Pepper-Up, but the muggle medicine you suggested worked really well.”

Hermione nodded in satisfaction. “I’m glad to hear it.”

Fenny appeared at that moment, levitating several pitchers of lemonade and a stack of glasses. She placed them gently on a nearby table before Disapparating again. Hermione poured two glasses, and then brought them over, handing one to Phoebe.

“Astoria was telling me that you’d like to hire a full-time counselor?” Hermione asked.

“Yes, I think it would be good for the children to have someone they know they can talk to any time they need to. Their teachers and nannies are here, of course, but I know some of the older children in particular would like someone…different.”

“I can understand that. I think it’s a good idea. Go ahead and hire someone, I trust you to find someone reliable and discreet. There are plenty of empty suites they can move into.”

“I’ll get started right away,” Phoebe said, looking pleased.

Hermione finished her glass of lemonade and then stood up and stretched. “I forgot how energetic they are! I guess I don’t get as much exercise as I should.”

Phoebe laughed. “There’s nothing like a bunch of enthusiastic children to make you feel old and
creaky.”

Hermione grinned. “Hardly creaky.”

Phoebe grinned back. “Well, maybe not creaky yet.”

“Still, I should reconsider going to the gym a few times a week. Anyway, I’m going to check in with Astoria and then I’ll join you for lunch.”

Hermione spent an hour discussing various administrative details with Astoria before they both joined the children for lunch in the dining room, which had been made more child-friendly, including with a lower table and sunny yellow walls.

After lunch, she spent more time playing with the children before returning home at half three. She spent the rest of the afternoon doing paperwork, had a quiet dinner, and then went to bed early.

*****

Hermione was glad to sleep in on Sunday, even though she knew she still had lots to do before Monday. She’d gotten an owl from Harry late yesterday evening saying that he’d be by around two, so she didn’t feel rushed as she had a late breakfast still in her pajamas. She changed into comfortable sweats and then started in on her paperwork.

As the clock ticked closer to two, Hermione started getting nervous. *This is ridiculous. He’s your oldest friend. So what if you snogged in a club. While dancing with Draco Malfoy.* Even knowing it was silly, Hermione changed into something slightly less sloppy than her holey sweatpants and ratty t-shirt.

Despite long experience having taught her that Harry would undoubtedly be late, at two o’clock Hermione was sitting in her living room with all her books on Veela in a neat stack on the table and a cup of tea prepared the way Harry liked under a stasis charm.

When the flames in the hearth turned green fifteen minutes later, Hermione nearly jumped into the air. *Get a hold of yourself!*

She forced herself to look down at the paperwork spread out on the table and then waited until she heard Harry step out of the fireplace before she looked up. She smiled when she looked at him. If there was one thing that was reliable about Harry Potter, it was that his hair was almost always in a perpetual state of disarray. It was currently sticking up crazily as though he hadn’t bothered to brush it that morning, although Hermione was sure he had.

“Hey, Hermione,” Harry said, waving his wand to vanish the soot that clung to his clothes before draping his coat over the back of the empty armchair.

“Hey, Harry.” Hermione stood and hugged him. *Just like friends do.* The hug was comforting and familiar, and she was relieved that there didn’t seem to be any lingering awkwardness from Friday night.

When he sat down he automatically cancelled the stasis charm and took a sip of the tea she’d set out for him. Hermione always had tea ready for him, and vice versa. It was one of their familiar habits.

Once Harry had set his teacup down, he fished around in his pocket before eventually pulling out several shrunken files and books, which he then enlarged to their original size.

“I brought the case files for you to review. I know you’ve seen some of them already, but I brought
them all so that you’d have everything in front of you. I also brought along all the books and papers we recovered from the house where he was holding Malfoy – everything that looked like it was related to the ritual.”

Hermione smiled at him in approval. “Perfect. Are you hoping to find anything in particular?” She cleared away the table, sending her paperwork to another table.

Harry set down the stack of papers and books and then ran a hand through his hair, doing nothing for its state of disarray. “I’m not sure. What Robards wants to know is whether you think it’s possible to turn a human into a Veela. We don’t think he succeeded, at any rate. We tested his blood and it was entirely human.”

Hermione nodded absently, already flipping through the case files, noting absently that Harry was working on another file. She had seen most of the files already, and she was mostly interested in the transcript of Harry’s most recent conversation with Dunham. She read it several times before going back through the other conversations. She then carefully looked through the photos from the house, especially those of the room where it looked Dunham had been setting up his ritual.

When she’d finished with the files, she turned her attention to the books. She quickly skimmed the titles and frowned. She’d rarely seen a more eclectic collection. There were books on magical creatures generally and on Veela specifically, Herbology texts, a book on native Haitian voodoo magic, several books on blood rituals, an advanced muggle chemistry textbook, another muggle book on genetics, a book on wizard oaths, three different books on the Dark Arts that Hermione knew were banned by the Ministry, and three books that looked like journals.

Slightly overwhelmed, she decided to start with his journals, hoping to make sense of the other books without wasting time. She opened each journal, trying to figure out which one was first. Dunham hadn’t done anything as useful as dating each entry, but she decided it was likely that the neatest journal was the earliest.

She spent nearly two hours going through the journals, knowing that she’d need a lot more time to go through them thoroughly. Even the parts she’d skimmed had made her decidedly ill. She set down the third journal and leaned back, stretching her back. Playing with the children yesterday had made her surprisingly sore.

Harry looked up at her. At some point, he’d made a pot of tea, which sat under a stasis charm. Hermione refreshed her cup, which had long since gone cold.

“Did you find anything?”

Hermione took a soothing sip of her tea before answering his question. “Unfortunately. The man is clearly deranged, you need to make sure he goes to Azkaban for a long time. The things he did were truly terrible.” When Hermione thought of those things being done to Malfoy, her vision grew red and hazy. She hadn’t had such a violent urge to hunt someone down and kill them since the war ended. She shook her head. Why on earth am I so protective of Malfoy?

Harry frowned. “Malfoy said something about curses.”

Hermione grimaced. “There was that. Dunham used curses in order to instigate Malfoy’s transformation. But Malfoy wasn’t the first person Dunham used to try to become a Veela. According his journals, Malfoy was the fourth person Dunham kidnapped.”

“The fourth?” Harry looked horrified.
Hermione nodded, handing Harry the second journal. “The first three people died when Dunham tried to complete the ritual he’d designed.”

Harry accepted the journal with one hand and rubbed his other hand through his hair. “Merlin, that’s awful. Malfoy didn’t mention anything about that.”

“He probably didn’t know.”

“So why didn’t Malfoy die?” Harry asked, flipping through the journal.

Hermione picked up the third journal. “From what I understand, I don’t think that Dunham had started the ritual yet with Malfoy. The potion that he was using in the ritual needed to brew for at least a fortnight after the ingredients were combined.” Thank Merlin.

“Well that’s something I suppose. So then what did Dunham mean when he said he was close? Was he actually close to making himself into a Veela?”

Hermione sighed. “It’s hard to say. Inventing spells and potions is tricky enough, but rituals are vastly more complicated. Added onto that, he was mixing several different types of magic and combining potions and spells – it’s impossible to say. He has some Arithmantic charts, but I haven’t checked his calculations.”

“So it’s possible?”

“He hadn’t completed the ritual, so it’s not possible that he succeeded. But I couldn’t say whether it’s possible that he could turn a human into a Veela without spending a lot more time with his journals. With how much research he put into this, he must have been working for months.”

Harry set down the journal. “Well, at least I have a better idea now of what to charge him with.”

Hermione bit her lip. “Harry,” she said, and then hesitated before pushing on, “I don’t think you should show these journals to many people.”

“Why?” he asked, looking curious but not wary.

“People are funny about Veela. You know how muggles are fascinated by vampires?”

Harry nodded.

“Well wizards are drawn to Veela in the same way. If word got out that someone had gotten close to a way to make themselves into a Veela…there would be people who would want to get their hands on that information. No matter how the information had been obtained.”

Harry sighed. “Like the wizards at the World Cup fourth year.”

“Right.” Hermione was relieved that Harry understood.

“I suppose it’s lucky that Malfoy’s father wants a closed trial. I even recommended it to Robards.”

Hermione restacked the journals. “If you leave these here, I can study them in closer detail.”

Harry nodded. “I’ll need the case files, but I can leave the books. Thank you for doing this.”

Hermione gave him a tired smile. “Of course.”

Now that they no longer had the distraction of work, an awkward and strangely charged silence
settled over Hermione’s living room. Harry shifted in his seat, staring at the table.

“Listen, Hermione, about Friday…”

“It’s fine, Harry,” Hermione rushed to say, blushing. Why couldn’t he have just let it be?

Harry peeked up at her. “I didn’t mean to take advantage of you.”

“You didn’t!” Hermione assured him. If anything, Malfoy is to blame. Stupid git and his silky voice.

Harry looked up at her more fully. “So you wanted to kiss me?”

_Uh… “Um…”_

“Because I wanted to kiss you. It wasn’t the alcohol. You must know that I’m attracted to you. Have been for years.”

And you choose now to tell me?! “Uh…” Come on, think of something to say!

“You haven’t seen anyone in a while. Ginny keeps me up to date,” he added with a half-smile.

“I…um, that is to say. Yes,” she squeaked. “I wanted to kiss you too.”

Hermione watched, mesmerized, as Harry’s eyes heated. He didn’t say anything for a moment.

“Good to know,” he finally said, voice raspy.

Hermione stared at him and unconsciously licked her lip. Her hand flew over her mouth when she realized what she’d done. Harry stared at her for a moment longer before standing.

She knew he’d grown tall, but she hadn’t realized just how tall until he towered over her. She gazed up at him. She’d noticed last night how muscled he was, and it was easy to see beneath the t-shirt he’d been wearing beneath his coat. She swallowed. She watched as Harry’s hands clenched and then slowly unclenched.

“I’ll see you later. Lunch, Tuesday?”

Hermione could only nod.

Harry slipped his coat on without breaking eye contact.

“Bye, Hermione.”

“Bye,” she replied, slightly breathless.

He grabbed a handful of Floo powder, called out for his flat, and then was gone.

*****

It felt surreal to go into work on Monday morning. She felt, in some way, fundamentally changed. It was strange to walk down the hall to her office. No one else was in that early, which was normal. She felt as though the world had shifted on its axis and yet it kept spinning.

She managed to bury herself in her work, distracting herself from some very distracting thoughts. She was surprised when she heard a knock on her door a little after ten. She knew she didn’t have a meeting until that afternoon, and Felicity would knock and then just come in.
“Come in,” she called.

She nearly dropped her quill when Malfoy strolled through the door. Seeing him immediately brought back memories of Friday night and being pressed against him. Her mouth went dry. *Did he get even more attractive?*

“Malfoy! Um, come in, sit down.” She gestured to the more comfortable of the two chairs in front of her desk. Once he’d sat down and a moment had passed without him saying anything, she asked, “What can I do for you?”

“Well, you did tell me to drop by if I needed help.”

Hermione managed to hold a conversation with Malfoy without embarrassing herself or spontaneously combusting, both of which she’d expected when he’d first stepped into the office. It didn’t help that they were discussing mates and mating laws. His wings were tucked away again, which didn’t surprise her, and his suit was perfectly cut to highlight how fit he was, not that she’d needed a reminder. Sitting across from him, she’d been fiercely glad that Dunham hadn’t had a chance to finish his ritual. The thought of Malfoy sent a wave a crushing despair and overwhelming rage through her. *Only because I would hate for anyone to die that way. This has nothing to do with Malfoy in particular. I’m attracted to Harry! Wait, no I’m not! I’m happy single! I don’t need anyone!*

Finding out he had two mates was more than a little surprising, but knowing how powerful a wizard he was, it made a little sense. She felt almost…jealous at the thought of another witch touching him. *We danced once! Why in Circe’s name am I feeling this way?*

When their fingers brushed as she handed him the book on Veela law, a shock that felt like lightning raced up her arm and then branched, going to heart and lower, to places that had absolutely no business responding to Malfoy.

“What was that?” she demanded, jerking her hand back.

Draco looked entirely unaffected, although a hint of a smirk hovered on his lips. “I’ve no idea what you mean.” He stood up. “You’ve been very helpful, Granger. Thank you.”

She stared at her fingertips but glanced up when she realized he hadn’t left yet.

He stood halfway through the door. “And thank you for the dance on Friday.” Then he was gone, the door swinging shut behind him.

Hermione’s whole body flooded with heat at those words and she slumped in her chair. *Fuck.*

Chapter End Notes

This chapter was much longer than usual, but I hope you don't mind :) Also, pax means peace in Latin.

Please let me know what you think! I love hearing from you! Read/comment/kudos!
Harry spent most of Saturday morning regretting drinking the night before and really regretting that he’d forgotten to refill his supply of Hangover Potion. After Malfoy had left him standing alone in that dark alcove, he’d spent a few minutes getting his breath back and forcing some excited portions of his anatomy to calm down before going back upstairs to the rest of the group where he’d stayed long enough to get ragerly drunk with Dean and Seamus before Flooing home.

When he finally stumbled out of bed an hour past noon, he walked into the bathroom and was extraordinarily pleased to find that he at least had some Pain Relief Potion and some Pepper-Up Potion, which would get him past the worst of the hangover that was threatening to make his brain melt through his ears. He took the potions quickly and waited the agonizing minutes for them to take effect.

His stomach turned over and he leaned over the toilet as his stomach roiled, but fortunately nothing made a reappearance. When he was sure his stomach was settled, he turned on the shower and set it to cold. He stepped inside and immediately started shivering, but the cold water was enough to calm the nausea. Why on earth did I kiss them? Fuck. Unfortunately his erection, which had come to life at the thought of kissing both Hermione and Malfoy, was more resistant to the icy needles. He turned the faucet to warm and took care of his problem as quickly as possible before getting clean. And he definitely did not think about Hermione and Malfoy.

After he’d dried off and changed into his most comfortable sweats, he made his way downstairs to the kitchen. He’d moved into Grimmauld Place after graduating from Hogwarts. It had taken months to renovate and remodel, but the house was now entirely stripped of the cold, musty, dark feeling that had permeated the very walls. Hermione and Ron had both helped, and Harry had even called on Bill to help take down the portrait of Walburga Black. The day the portrait had been removed, he’d taken it into the backyard and burned it. Hermione had rolled her eyes and told him he was being
immature, but Harry had not yet gotten over Sirius’ death. Time had done little to dull the pain.

Harry shook his head to clear those thoughts from his mind as he put the kettle on. While he waited for the water to boil, he made himself a bowl of cereal and started munching on it. Kreacher had died five years ago and Harry hadn’t felt comfortable getting another house elf. Hermione had backed down from her hardline stance against house elf enslavement, but Harry hadn’t wanted to attempt buying or hiring one regardless.

When the kettle whistled, he made himself a cup of tea loaded with sugar and only a splash of milk. He sat down at the table and then ate breakfast while he read the *Prophet* that his owl, Beowulf, had brought. Beowulf had been a gift from Hermione when they’d both returned to Hogwarts for an eighth year to make up for the year they’d spent on the run. Harry was amused by the muggle name, and even though he couldn’t replace Hedwig, Harry had grown fond of the dark grey owl who was grumpy more often than not. And he’d been more grateful to Hermione than he’d told her that she’d gone out to buy him an owl so he didn’t have to and face the loss of Hedwig again.

Harry spent the rest of the day staring at the files for Malfoy’s case. Malfoy. Draco. After thoroughly snogging him, Harry wasn’t at all sure what to call him. Or what to do about it. He shouldn’t do anything, of course. *He’s probably just messing with you.* What he couldn’t figure out was why Malfoy would mess with him by sticking his tongue down his throat. And Malfoy had seemed at least as affected as Harry, if his physical reaction was anything to go by.

And Hermione. Kissing her was better than anything he’d imagined. *Not that I’ve imagined kissing her. Definitely not.* He was both excited and reluctant to see her the next day. He put off owling her as long as possible, but finally sent an owl after eating dinner, and drinking a glass of Firewhisky, to let her know he’d come by at two.

As he lay in bed that night he couldn’t get the image of Malfoy with his arms around Hermione and the feeling of Malfoy’s hand on his waist out his mind. When he dreamed, it was about Malfoy and Hermione wrapped around him.

He was up late again on Sunday morning. After getting out of bed, he ate breakfast slowly as he read the Sunday *Prophet*. So far nothing had appeared about the Malfoy case; if something had shown up, Robards would have had words for someone. The more pieces of the Dunham puzzle fell into place, the more eager Robards and Harry were to keep it under wraps.

After cleaning up his breakfast, Harry took a cold shower for the second morning in a row. When he got out, he spent more time than he normally would choosing what to wear. He felt silly as he picked a pair of jeans that Ginny had told him looked nice on him – although nice wasn’t the word she’d used – and a black long sleeve t-shirt that Ginny had forced on him last Christmas, claiming he had no fashion sense. A not entirely inaccurate statement. A childhood of hand-me-downs had prevented any interest in the clothes he wore from growing, and as an adult he hadn’t cultivated an interest beyond buying clothes that fit.

He spent almost an hour gathering all the paperwork related to the case. It was scattered around the house and Harry eventually had to resort to an *Accio* when he realized he was already ten minutes late. Hastily, he shrunk all the books and papers, grabbed a file for another open case to look at while Hermione was busy, and then threw a handful of Floo powder into the fireplace in the kitchen.

“Heckeime Granger’s flat!” he said clearly, stepping in. He’d learned his lesson about mumbling.

After a moment the flames stopped rushing by and he stepped out into a living room that was nearly
as familiar as his own. Hermione was engrossed in papers spread across the coffee table.

“Hey, Hermione,” he said to get her attention. He Vanished the soot off his clothes with a well-practiced flick of his wand. Hermione had lectured him enough times about not getting soot all over her flat. When he was sure his clothes were clean, he took his coat off and then draped it over the chair by the fireplace.

Hermione looked up and smiled. “Hey, Harry.” She stood and gave him a hug.

*She is a friend. A friend, damn it!* He hugged her back while he repeated that mantra. Hugging her brought back memories of dancing with her, but he was determined not to bring it up and make everything awkward.

He released her and they both sat down. A cup of tea sat in front of his chair and he cancelled the stasis charm he could feel hovering over it and then took a sip. After so many years of friendship, they both knew how the other took their tea, and it was perfect. There was something so familiar about sharing a cuppa with her. He could imagine sitting and drinking tea with her for the rest of his life. He forcefully pushed those thoughts away. *She doesn’t think of you that way.*

He set down his cup and then dug through his pockets to find all the files and books. Once he was sure he’d found them all, he cast an *Engorgio* to return them to their normal size.

“I brought the case files for you to review,” he told her. “I know you’ve seen some of them already, but I brought them all so that you’d have everything in front of you. I also brought along all the books and papers we recovered from the house where he was holding Malfoy – everything that looked like it was related to the ritual.”

Hermione smiled. “Perfect. Are you hoping to find anything in particular?”

Harry set everything on the table. He ran a hand through his hair while he thought. “I’m not sure. What Robards wants to know is whether you think it’s possible to turn a human into a Veela. We don’t think he succeeded, at any rate. We tested his blood and it was entirely human.” *Thank goodness. No man that awful should have the charm of a Veela too.*

In true Hermione fashion, by the time he’d finished talking, she’d already started looking through the files. Harry smiled and turned to the file he’d brought to work on while she was occupied with the Malfoy case. It wasn’t nearly as interesting, but he didn’t want to work on the case as well and interrupt her thought process if she needed a file he was looking at. Years of watching her work had taught him all about her focus. He was able to appreciate her brilliance now in a way he hadn’t been able to while at Hogwarts.

When an hour had gone by and she was still engrossed in the case, although he saw she’d switched to looking at the diaries, he decided to make a pot of tea. He knew his way around her kitchen and soon had the kettle on and a pot out. He and Hermione had never broken the habit of making tea the muggle way. And tea just tasted better when the water was boiled in a kettle instead of heated with magic.

Hermione didn’t notice when he returned, but he didn’t mind. He refreshed his cup and then put the pot under a stasis charm for when she finally emerged.

He couldn’t help but watch her, although he did so from under his lashes while ostensibly working on his file in case she glanced up. *She’s so beautiful.* He’d noticed years ago, of course. Ron hadn’t been the only one shocked at the Yule Ball – Harry just hadn’t made a scene. The year on the run hadn’t done anyone any favors, but she’d lost the thin, sickly look during their eighth year at
Hogwarts. The house elves had gotten over their fear of her after the battle and they’d made a special effort to “fatten them up.” He distinctly remembered Kreacher poking his stomach and declaring him too bony. Hermione had received similar treatment from Winky.

The years since had somewhat softened what seven years of danger and anger and fear had made hard. But he saw new lines of stress and he wondered if she was getting enough sleep. *Maybe she still has nightmares?* Harry frowned at the thought.

He shook himself when he realized he’d been staring at her. He looked down at his file – a simple break-and-enter – and managed to work through most of the paperwork before he saw Hermione stretch out of the corner of his eye. He looked up.

“Did you find anything?” he asked.

Hermione poured herself a new cup of tea from the pot and took a sip. “Unfortunately. The man is clearly deranged, you need to make sure he goes to Azkaban for a long time. The things he did were truly terrible.”

Harry frowned. “Malfoy said something about curses.” *Although I wouldn’t put it past him to have played it down. Damn Malfoy pride.*

Hermione looked upset. “There was that. Dunham used curses in order to instigate Malfoy’s transformation. But Malfoy wasn’t the first person Dunham used to try to become a Veela. According his journals, Malfoy was the fourth person Dunham kidnapped.”

“The fourth?” That was far worse than he had imagined.

Hermione nodded and handed Harry the second journal. “The first three people died when Dunham tried to complete the ritual he’d designed.”

Harry pushed a hand through his hair and took the journal with the other. “Merlin, that’s awful. Malfoy didn’t mention anything about that.”

“He probably didn’t know,” she said.

*Thank Merlin we found Malfoy when we did.* “So why didn’t Malfoy die?” He opened the journal, flipping through it. He hadn’t had a chance to look through them yet, and he was disturbed by what little he read as he skimmed.

Hermione picked up the third journal. “From what I understand, I don’t think that Dunham had started the ritual yet with Malfoy. The potion that he was using in the ritual needed to brew for at least a fortnight after the ingredients were combined.”

Harry grimaced. “Well that’s something I suppose. So then what did Dunham mean when he said he was close? Was he actually close to making himself into a Veela?” *Please say no.*

Hermione sighed. “It’s hard to say. Inventing spells and potions is tricky enough, but rituals are vastly more complicated. Added onto that, he was mixing several different types of magic and combining potions and spells – it’s impossible to say. He has some Arithmantic charts, but I haven’t checked his calculations.”

“So it’s possible?” If it were possible…that would be a problem on so many levels.

“He hadn’t completed the ritual, so it’s not possible that he succeeded. But I couldn’t say whether it’s possible that he could turn a human into a Veela without spending a lot more time with his journals.
With how much research he put into this, he must have been working for months.”

Harry set down the journal, only just resisting the urge to wipe his hand on his pants. He felt dirty just from handling the book. “Well, at least I have a better idea now of what to charge him with.”

Hermione bit her lip and his thoughts immediately went to their kiss Friday night. *Stop that!*

“Harry,” she said and then paused before starting again. “I don’t think you should show these journals to many people.”

“Why?” He wasn’t planning on it, but he wanted to know why she thought so as well.

“People are funny about Veela. You know how muggles are fascinated by vampires?”

He nodded.

“Well wizards are drawn to Veela in the same way. If word got out that someone had gotten close to a way to make themselves into a Veela…there would be people who would want to get their hands on that information. No matter how the information had been obtained.”

Harry sighed. *Of course.* “Like the wizards at the World Cup fourth year.”

“Right.”

“I suppose it’s lucky that Malfoy’s father wants a closed trial. I even recommended it to Robards.”

Hermione picked up the journal he’d put down and stacked it on top of the others. “If you leave these here, I can study them in closer detail.”

Harry nodded gratefully. “I’ll need the case files, but I can leave the books. Thank you for doing this.”

Hermione smiled tiredly. “Of course.”

Harry felt bad, adding onto what he knew was a large workload, but he couldn’t think of anyone else he trusted or who be as useful. Not only was Hermione the smartest person he knew, she was an expert in magical creatures. He respected her, he admired her, and he loved her, but just as a friend, of course.

Although he wasn’t sure that was true anymore, if it had ever been. The weight of Friday hung in the air and he fidgeted, staring down at his hands.

“Listen, Hermione, about Friday…” he started awkwardly.

“It’s fine, Harry,” Hermione said, cutting him off.

Harry peeked up at her and saw that she was blushing. *Hermione doesn’t blush. That’s…interesting.* But even though it was clear she wanted to let things lie, he had to voice the thought that had been plaguing him since then. “I didn’t mean to take advantage of you.”

“You didn’t!”

Harry lifted his head, looking at her fully. “So you wanted to kiss me?”

“Um…” Her blush deepened.
Fuck it. “Because I wanted to kiss you. It wasn’t the alcohol. You must know that I’m attracted to you. Have been for years.” He rushed out the last part, knowing he’d never have the courage to say it again if he didn’t say it now.

“Uh…”

“You haven’t seen anyone in a while. Ginny keeps me up to date,” he said, a corner of his mouth lifting. She hadn’t said anything yet, and he was starting to get nervous. *Maybe she really does think of me as just a friend. Fuck.* His heart dropped at the thought.

“I…um, that is to say. Yes,” she finally said, her voice much higher than normal. “I wanted to kiss you too.”

Harry stared at her and all he could think of was kissing her again. Pressing her back against the couch and snogging her until neither of them could think. He couldn’t form words for a long moment.

“Good to know,” he finally said, his voice raspy.

She didn’t respond, just licked her lip. *Bloody hell.* If he didn’t get out of here, he’d do more than snog her, and it was clear she wasn’t ready by the way she quickly covered her mouth, eyes wide, when she realized what she’d done. He wasn’t sure he was ready, either.

He stood up. She stared at him, eyes wide and filled with the same look from Friday night. He had to clench his fists to keep from acting on the lust that was threatening to overtake all the sense he’d accumulated as an Auror. He forced his hands to unclench.

“I’ll see you later. Lunch, Tuesday?” he managed to ask, voice almost normal.

Hermione nodded silently.

Harry grabbed his coat and put it on without looking away. “Bye, Hermione.”

“Bye,” she said and the catch in her voice almost convinced him to stay.

Instead, he grabbed a handful of Floo powder and threw it into the flames.

“Grimmauld Place.”

*****

It wasn’t until he went into work on Monday morning that Harry realized he’d left all the Malfoy case files at Hermione’s flat. Even though he could have gone down to her office, he decided to send her a memo instead. He scrawled a quick note on a scrap of parchment and then flicked it into the air, imbuing it with the spell to send it on its way. It folded itself into a little airplane and then winged out of the open door of his office.

Harry was distracted for most of the rest of the day, but he was able to work on some of his other open cases. He was very glad Robards didn’t ask to see him about the Malfoy case, because it would have been awkward to explain that he’d forgotten the paperwork at Hermione’s house. For once, he was glad of a quiet day in the Auror Department.

He should have known that the quiet wouldn’t last long. The next two days passed restfully enough
Hermione sent him the Malfoy files by owl Monday evening, and then they continued to studiously
avoid each other – but on Thursday morning, Harry received an owl from Kingsley with a meeting
time for that afternoon.

Harry went through the motions of work in the morning, managed to get through lunch in the
Ministry cafeteria – he hadn’t gone out to lunch with Hermione once that week – and then presented
himself to Kingsley’s secretary at five minutes before two o’clock. Harry might be friends with
Kingsley, but even he couldn’t get away with being late to a meeting with the Minister for Magic.

His secretary looked up when he walked up. “You can go in, Auror Potter.”

Harry nodded at her and then walked into Kingsley’s office. The Minister looked the same as he
always had, although there were a few more lines at the corners of his eyes. “Hello, Kingsley.”

Kingsley smiled at him and gestured to one of the chairs in front of his desk. “Harry, come in, sit
down.” As Harry sat down, Kingsley waved his wand to close the door and Harry felt wards go up
at the same time.

“What’s this about?” Harry asked. “Is it the Malfoy case?”

Kingsley folded his hands. “Indirectly. I received a visit from Draco Malfoy yesterday.”

“Is he bothering you about his case not being closed yet? Because we’re doing the best we can,”
Harry said defensively.

Kingsley shook his head. “He didn’t come about the case. Didn’t even bring it up. He offered to host
the Ministry’s Samhain Ball this year.”

Harry frowned. “What?”

“He did what?” Kingsley asked dryly.

“Why does he want to host the ball?”

Kingsley shrugged. “He claims it’s because he wants to continue his efforts to redeem the Malfoy
name.”

Harry snorted. “How altruistic.”

Kingsley laughed. “I would not have believed him if he’d said anything else. However, he also said
that he supports the cause the ball is raising money for this year.”

“What’s that?”

“The Home for War Orphans. I’m surprised Hermione didn’t mention it to you.”

Yes, well, we’ve had other things on our minds. Harry cleared his throat. “You know she doesn’t like
to talk about her work.”

Kingsley sighed. “Yes, I know. I’m going to try to convince her to speak this year.”

Harry snorted. “Good luck with that. Getting her to even attend anything at Malfoy Manor will be a
challenge.”

“Indeed. But I didn’t actually want to meet to talk about Hermione. I wanted to make sure you’d be
attending the ball even if it’s hosted at Malfoy Manor.” Kingsley looked at him with an expression
that left no doubt about what he wanted Harry’s answer to be.

“Is that really a question?”

Kingsley’s lips twitched. “No. As Deputy Head of the Auror Department, you’d be required to attend anyway for security, but as Harry Potter, I want you there for your support of the cause as well as the continued efforts to mend the rifts in the wizarding world. You going to Malfoy Manor would show that there are no hard feelings left between two of the most famous rivals from the war.”

*Well it’s certainly not our feelings that are hard anymore.* “Hasn’t that been made clear enough already? Draco Malfoy and I have seen each other quite a few times over the years. And I’m personally in charge of his case now.” *And our personal lives have gotten much more intimate very recently.*

“Well the public doesn’t know about his case,” Kingsley pointed out. “And even though you two have been in the same room before, you have rarely interacted directly. Going to the Manor is an important step.”

Harry ran a hand through his hair. He hated politics. “I’ll be there.”

Kingsley rapped his knuckles on his desk. “Excellent. The invitations go out tomorrow.” Kingsley gave him a look. “Will you be bringing anyone?”

His thoughts immediately went to Hermione and, if he were being honest with himself, which he didn’t usually have to force himself to be, Malfoy, as he’d looked on Friday with mussed hair and a wicked smirk.

Harry wasn’t sure he’d ever blushed in front of Kingsley, but he was now. “No, I don’t think so.”

Kingsley raised an eyebrow. “Very well. I look forward to seeing you there.”

Harry stood up. He nodded at Kingsley and left.

As he walked back to the Auror Department, Harry resigned himself to the fact that he was pleased about having to see Malfoy again.

Chapter End Notes

Please read/comment/kudos!
(Mis)steps

Chapter Summary

If he hadn't been so distracted with thoughts of her, Draco would never have forgotten one important detail.

Chapter Notes

First of all, Happy New Year everyone!! Second, I am so so so sorry for the long delay on this update. Finals and holidays and family kept me really busy during December and unfortunately this fic had to go to a back-burner, but I'm back now! This fic will definitely pick up and I should have a little more time now for writing.

Thank you so much to everyone who stuck with this story and commented/bookmarked/left kudos! A million hearts to all of you!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Once Draco had decided to host a Samhain ball, he realized there was no reason he shouldn’t take it one step further. On Monday evening he sent an owl to the Minister for Magic to make an appointment, and he received an owl on Tuesday morning confirming an appointment for precisely two o’clock on Wednesday afternoon. Even if he wasn’t everyone’s favorite person, the Malfoy name still pulled weight at the Ministry.

He went to the Ministry on Wednesday with his wings tucked away, arriving at the office two minutes early for his meeting. The secretary flirted with him for those two minutes before admitting him to the Minister’s office.

Draco strode in confidently, but enough deference that the Minister wouldn’t find him presumptuous. Kingsley sat behind his desk, looking curious.

“Have a seat, Mister Malfoy,” Kingsley said.

Draco nodded at him, sitting in one of the almost-comfortable chairs in front of the Minister’s desk. “Hello, Minister.”

“You’re looking well, Malfoy. I take it you are recovered from your ordeal?” Kingsley asked neutrally.

“I am, yes.” Draco didn’t see the need to expand upon his recovery.

When Kingsley didn’t say anything in reply, Draco knew that he wouldn’t say anything until Draco told him why he’d come. Normally Draco forced the other person in a conversation to speak first, but Draco was in the weaker position and they both knew it.

“I asked to speak with you to discuss Samhain.”
Kingsley raised his eyebrows. “Oh?”

“It is the custom of the Ministry to host a Samhain ball each year to celebrate, and the ball is traditionally hosted by a member of the Wizengamot or a Department Head.”

Kingsley’s expression didn’t change. “I am aware of the tradition.”

Draco bowed his head slightly. “Since I have recently taken up my family’s seat on the Wizengamot, I would like to offer Malfoy Manor for this year’s ball, and I volunteer to host, if the position is not already taken.” He was well aware that it was not, or he would not have offered.

“I see. And why this sudden magnanimity?”

They both knew it wasn’t a magnanimous gesture. For one, hosting a Ministry ball, while expensive, was usually considered a social coup. “The Malfoy name has…suffered in recent years. I would like the chance to redeem my family’s name, in at least some small way.”

Kingsley stared at him for a long moment, hands clasped over his stomach. Draco maintained his air of perfect calm. Political games needed a cool head and great patience. His father had taught him that, if nothing else.

Finally, he nodded. “Very well. I trust you require no assistance with planning?”

It was a rhetorical question, but Draco shook his head anyway. “I’m sure I can manage.” His mother would be thrilled.

“I’d be happy to have a certain Auror at my disposal. I’m sure I’d be glad of their assistance.”

“Good. Well, I look forward to the invitation,” Kingsley said, a slight twist of his mouth that could almost be a smile.

“Thank you for this opportunity, Minister,” Draco said, standing. He held out his hand and Kingsley shook it, standing briefly.

Draco left, knowing he was dismissed. He flashed a smile at the secretary on his way out.

Upon Apparating home, he found his mother in the Blue Parlor having afternoon tea. She was reading a book, but she laid it aside when he walked in.

“Draco, dear.” She poured him a cup of tea – the house elves always provided two cups – and then prepared it to his liking. “How are you?” she asked, handing him the cup.

Draco took a sip before replying. “Excellent, thank you, Mother.” He took another sip. “I just had a delightful chat with the Minister for Magic.”

His mother betrayed no hint of surprise. “Indeed? And how is Minister Shacklebolt?”

“He was very pleased with my suggestion of hosting the Ministry’s Samhain Ball at the Manor. I assured him that you more than able to take up the task of planning such an important event,” Draco said, smiling slightly.
“That’s not much time to plan an event,” she said, tapping a finger against her cup and looking at him with mild censure.

“I apologize for the short notice,” he said, inclining his head slightly.

“It’s no matter,” his mother said, waving a hand elegantly. “However, I am sure Daphne would be a great help to me, given how little time there is until Samhain.”

Draco was quite sure his mother did not need Daphne Greengrass’s help. He gritted his teeth. “I am sure she would.”

“I’ll invite her over this weekend. We had such a lovely luncheon together before, so you must join us again, Draco.” His mother smiled at him sweetly.

*Lovely, my arse.* “As always, I’d be delighted, Mother.”

“Excellent. Well, I shall see to the invitations immediately. They must be sent out as soon as possible.”

Draco set down his teacup. “Thank you for attending to this, Mother.”

“Of course, dear.”

Draco rose and then nodded at her before heading to his office. Even though he would have much rather been doing other things, business would not take care of itself.

*****

His mother was true to her word, and the invitations went out on Friday. The Malfoys had a large owlrey, but even so, it took nearly all day for the invitations to be delivered. The most important guests received their invitations earlier, of course. Draco had ensured that in addition to the Minister and several department heads, Potter and Granger received their invitations in the first round of owls.

It wasn’t until Friday afternoon while sitting reviewing some patent applications that Draco realized the obvious problem with inviting Granger to the Manor. He’d hardly forgotten the war, and all the terrible things that had happened within the Manor during the year Voldemort had made it his home, but since the Manor had been extensively remodeled, most days he was able to avoid thinking about it. *But of course Granger will think about that!* Draco quickly summoned his owl before writing a note to her. By the time his eagle owl arrived, Draco had completed his note. He attached the parchment to the owl’s leg before sending him on his way.

He was shocked to receive a reply only an hour later. It was terse, and scrawled in a way which suggested that she had either been in a hurry or very upset, but it still made his heartbeat kick up a notch.

*Malfoy,*

*Sunday. 2 o’clock.*

*Hermione Granger*

*****

Saturday passed interminably slow. He went through the house meticulously, looking for anything which might remind Granger of her previous visit, but his mother had been extremely thorough in
her efforts to redo the Manor. He also spent more than an hour wrestling with the wards in preparation for her visit.

The only interruption to his thoughts and his efforts was the threatened lunch with Daphne. Unfortunately, Astoria had not come along and so there was no buffer for Daphne’s blatantly obvious flattery and flirtation. Draco wasn’t able to choke down more than a cucumber sandwich during the hour he was forced to sit and entertain ‘their guest,’ as his mother had called her. *I didn’t invite her over!* Finally, when he deemed he’d been tortured enough, and with his meager lunch threatening to reappear if Daphne touched his arm one more time, he excused himself, saying he had work that needed his urgent attention.

At ten minutes before two o’clock on Sunday afternoon, Draco was standing precisely five feet away from the Apparition point outside the Manor’s wards. He’d included the coordinates in the note he’d sent to Granger, and he trusted her to be on time, if not early. He had his wings out but tucked neatly against his back; he’d considered hiding them completely, but realized that with one of his mates so close, they’d be likely to come out anyway and he didn’t want to startle her with their sudden reappearance when she’d probably already be on edge.

When a whoosh of air and a soft crack signaled her arrival five minutes later, he was ready. He steadied her gently and then forced himself to take a step back. Even that small contact had his Veela at attention and his wings ruffled. “Hello, Granger.”

She smoothed down her coat with hands that shook the tiniest bit. “Malfoy.”

Draco couldn’t help but notice the tight lines around her eyes and mouth. He knew this visit would be hard, but he was glad she’d agreed to it at all. He held out his arm. “Shall we?” When she only gave his arm a suspicious look, he explained. “You need to have contact with me for the wards to accept you.”

He didn’t tell her that he’d arranged it so that when they stepped through the wards together, they would be keyed to her. He didn’t want anything about the Manor to be unwelcoming to her. *Because this will be her home as well, if I have anything to say about it.* His Veela seemed contented by that thought.

She hesitated a moment longer before accepting his arm. “Are they blood wards?” she asked as they started walking toward the house, clearly trying to keep her mind occupied.

He nodded. “Yes, put in place by the first Malfoy to build on this ground and renewed every generation.”

“How are you planning on opening them for the ball?”

“The invitations are keyed to the wards. Anyone holding an invitation with their name on it will be able to access the wards on the night of Samhain, but only that night.”

“Clever,” she murmured, clearly distracted by the ripple of the wards as they stepped onto Malfoy property.

For Draco, walking through the wards normally felt like walking through a ripple of water, but this time there was a tingle that sparked along his skin. From the way Hermione held up her hand and examined it, she’d felt it as well. It felt nearly the same as the spark when he’d shaken her hand in her office.
As they got closer to the house, Draco noticed Hermione’s complexion grow paler.

“I thought we could start with a tour of the gardens–”

“No, thank you,” Hermione interrupted softly. She cleared her throat. “I’d rather go…there…first.” She glanced up at him, her mouth set firmly.

“Whatever you’d like,” he agreed. *Forever.*

They finally reached the steps leading up to the front door, which swung open when they reached the porch. If Hermione’s grip on his arm tightened when they stepped inside, he wasn’t going to mention it.

The house elf who’d opened the door greeted them. “Welcome, Master Draco, Mistress Hermione. Can Lotty be taking your coats?”

Draco stepped back and helped Hermione take off her light jacket, leaving her in a soft cream sweater and blue muggle trousers. He wasn’t surprised she’d worn muggle clothes. *She’s beautiful anyway.* He handed her jacket to Lotty, who waited patiently for Draco to remove his own outer robe before Disapparating with a soft *pop.*

Hermione remained facing away from him for a moment, her head turning to examine the large foyer.

“It looks different,” she said, voice neutral. She finally turned back around to face him.

“We redecorated. It was the first thing my mother did after she was cleared by the Wizengamot,” he explained. He offered her his arm again. “Shall we?”

She stared at his arm for a moment before squaring her shoulders. “Yes.”

Draco didn’t say anything as they walked down the hallway that led to drawing room. He drew her to a stop in front of a wooden door carved with woodland scenes. She dropped his arm. He paused with his hand on the door handle. “Are you ready?”

She looked at him and nodded.

He opened the door and stood aside to let her enter.

The room had been altered as completely as possible. It was smaller than it had been – part of the space had been used to create a solarium on the other side at the end of the hallway. Where it had been dark and dim, his mother had brought light and warmth. The walls were painted pale peach, and the furniture was all new and done in various warm shades to complement the walls.

Draco stood near the door and let her deal with her demons, even though the Veela was clawing at his mind for him to go and comfort her. But he knew this was one battle she wanted and needed to fight alone. He watched as she walked into the center of the room, shoulders slightly hunched and arms wrapped around herself. She glanced around once and then seemed to stare at something he couldn’t see. He doubted her mind was that occupied by the painting of a unicorn in a forest that hung on the wall in front of her.

He wasn’t sure how long they stood in that room, the silence wrapping around them. He couldn’t help but be caught up in his own memories of that day as he watched her.

Months of terror and constant anxiety had weighed on his shoulders and then seeing her, battered
and bruised and starved, dragged into the room by Snatchers, he’d realized exactly how far he’d fallen. Watching her being tortured at the hand of his aunt had been excruciating, and he hadn’t even been at the end of that knife. He hadn’t been able to turn away, even though part of him desperately hadn’t wanted to watch her lose her mind, but part of him had needed to bear witness to her bravery. And part of him had wanted to throw himself in front of her. Now he knew, of course, why he’d been so protective of her despite hating her for most of his childhood, but that wasn’t why he’d fallen a little in love with her.

A soft voice disturbed his thoughts.

“Thank you.”

Draco jerked his head up to look at her. She was still standing in the center of the room, but her arms were at her sides and her head was raised proudly.

He nearly choked on his shame and guilt. “You have nothing to thank me for.”

She tilted her head. “Thank you for letting me face my demons.” She glanced around again. “This room holds no ghosts for me. Not anymore.”

*Merlin, she is amazing.* “I’m glad to hear that.”

She walked toward him. When she stood in front of him, she watched him for a moment before reaching up with one hand and gently tracing his jaw. “I forgive you, Draco.”

He closed his eyes against the burning sensation that threatened. *I don’t deserve your forgiveness.* “I wouldn’t have asked that of you.”

“I know. But I do,” she said simply, her hand still cupping his cheek.

He opened his eyes. A tear was dripping down her cheek and he gently wiped it away. “Thank you,” he said. And he knew it wasn’t enough to say everything he meant, but he wasn’t sure he could ever say all of that.

She gave him a sad little smile and let her hand drop.

They were both silent for a moment.

“Do you want to see the rest of the house?” Draco asked, realizing that they were still standing in a room she’d probably never really be comfortable in.

She hesitated. “I’m not sure I’m quite up for that,” she finally replied.

He could understand that. “How about a cup of tea?”

She considered for a moment. “Yes, I think that would be nice.”

He stepped away slightly and offered her his arm again. She took it without hesitating this time and he could have cheered. He led her out of the room, closing the door softly behind them, and then to the breakfast room his mother had designed. It was adjacent to the kitchen, but muffling charms built into the doorway kept out the noise from the house elves at work.

He guided her into a seat at the pale wooden table set in a large alcove created by a wide bay window. When she was settled, he took the seat across from her after quickly Vanishing the back of the chair to make room for his wings. He summoned Pipsy with a snap.
Pipsy appeared with a soft crack. “Yes, Master Draco?”

“Tea, please, Pipsy.”

“Of course, Master Draco!” Pipsy bowed and then popped out again.

Granger regarded him steadily. “You treat your house elves well.”

He wasn’t sure if it was a question, but he decided to treat it as one. “I like to think that I’ve learned from some of my father’s mistakes.” He smirked slightly.

He was pleased to see Granger smile a little in response. “I suppose it took you long enough.”

He shrugged. “Some lessons take longer than others.”

Pipsy popped in and floated the tea tray onto the table before popping out again.

Draco picked up the pot and poured them both a cup of tea. “Milk or sugar?”

Hermione looked at him, eyebrows creased. “A splash of milk, please.”

He added the milk to her cup and then fixed his own. When he looked up again, she was still looking at him as though he were a puzzle she couldn’t figure out.

“Yes?”

“You’re not what I expected.”

Draco tilted his head, taking a small sip of tea before setting his cup down. “In what way?”

Her lips quirked. “Well, the wings for one thing. You didn’t have them out when you, uh, came to visit.”

She looked over his shoulder at them and he couldn’t help but extend the right wing into the room, flaring the feathers. The urge to show off for his mate could only be restrained so much. She gasped softly and his Veela hummed in appreciation. He brought it back in after a moment, but he did relax both of his wings from the tight position he’d been holding them in all afternoon.

“I don’t usually have them out in public.” He didn’t say whether or not he regarded as being or public or not. *Have to keep her guessing at least a little.* There was no small part of him that wanted her to do a bit of the chasing.

“Can you fly?” she asked, still staring at the curve visible above his shoulder and apparently choosing not to follow down the road he’d left open.

Draco lifted his wings slightly and the soft breeze stirred the ends of his hair. “Yes.” And he couldn’t keep the pleased smile off his face.

“Really? So do you have all the Veela abilities? Or just some? Are there any notable differences between male and female Veela? There isn’t nearly as much written on male Veela, and they’re quite rare of course, and none of the information is first-hand, like there is for female Veela.” She trailed off, switching her gaze from his wings to his eyes. She blushed and then looked down. She took a sip of tea. “You don’t have to tell me, of course, if you don’t want to.”

Draco wanted to crow with the excitement running through his veins at the thought that Granger was curious about him. *She wants to know things about me! She’s interested!* He kept his thoughts to
himself, though, not wanting to frighten her away just when she was beginning to trust him. “I have some books you might be interested in, if you’d like to visit the library?”

When she stared at him with wide eyes and nearly dropped her teacup, he knew he had her.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think! Do you want to hear Hermione's thoughts during this scene in the next chapter? Move ahead with the plot? Both? Leave a comment and let me know!
Letters

Chapter Summary

If Malfoy could be less confusing, Hermione would really appreciate it.

Chapter Notes

I’m so sorry for the long delay on this chapter! Unfortunately the free time I thought I’d have never quite materialized. I will still be posting chapters, but it might be every two weeks or so. Thank you so much to everyone who stuck around this long! And of course, many thanks to everyone who followed/commented/left kudos!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hermione hadn’t been sure what to expect from her visit to Malfoy Manor. When she’d gotten Malfoy’s invitation on Friday she’d been furious. Furious that Malfoy had the gall to invite her to Malfoy Manor after everything that had happened during the war. Furious that a single letter had the power to upset the calm she’d managed to achieve in her life. But overlaid with all that was the memory of him dancing in the club, of snogging him in the club. Why did that have to feel so good?

She’d been tempted to firecall Harry, but things still weren’t the same between them. They hadn’t even had lunch together on Tuesday like they usually did, even though they’d had plans to. When Malfoy’s letter had arrived later that afternoon, she’d sent him a terse reply and then owled Luna to arrange to meet on Saturday to have tea and talk.

Hermione certainly hadn’t expected Luna to defend Malfoy. Luna had told her that she ought to give Malfoy a chance – that perhaps it really had been a mistake, an oversight, just as he’d said in his letter. Hermione hadn’t wanted to give him the benefit of the doubt, but Luna had a way of persuading her and eventually she’d managed to talk herself into thinking it wouldn’t be so bad.

And it wasn’t as bad as she’d thought it would be, but it wasn’t a picnic either.

After all that, sitting across from Malfoy, drinking tea in a small, brightly lit room, felt nearly surreal. She could feel the weight of the war pressing on her shoulders, but it was lighter than she’d thought it would be after visiting that room. It helped that she found Malfoy far more distracting than she’d expected. After his visit to her office on Monday, she’d thought about him far more often than she would readily admit even to Ginny or Luna. Especially to Ginny.

He’s certainly handsome.

When Malfoy briefly spread out his wing, the light from the large window glinted off the silver feathers and made them look ethereal. She couldn’t help but stare at them.

They were certainly eye-catching, and she wasn’t surprised when he said that he usually didn’t have them out in public.
“Can you fly?” she asked, her intellectual curiosity overriding the wonder which had momentarily left her speechless.

He lifted his wings slightly and the gentle wind they created was enough to stir his hair and raise goosebumps on her arms. “Yes,” he replied, a smile taking over his face.

*It’s really not fair that he’s this attractive, and charming as well.* Hermione supposed some of it was from being a Veela, but she didn’t feel glamored. And at least it succeeded in distracting her almost completely from the morbid thoughts that had occupied her mind from the moment she’d received his letter.

“Well?” she asked. “So do you have all the Veela abilities? Or just some? Are there any notable differences between male and female Veela? There isn’t nearly as much written on male Veela, and they’re quite rare of course, and none of the information is first-hand, like there is for female Veela…” She cut herself off, aware that she was asking rather personal questions. She took a sip of tea to hide her embarrassment. “You don’t have to tell me, of course, if you don’t want to.”

He didn’t seem to mind though, if his small smile was anything to judge by. “I have some books you might be interested in, if you’d like to visit the library?”

*If? She nearly dropped her teacup. She’d heard rumors about the Malfoy library. It was famous. And even though she knew that the Ministry had confiscated some of the Dark texts after the war, she had no doubt that it was still one of the finest libraries in wizarding Britain. She cleared her throat when she realized several moments had passed and she hadn’t answered.*

“Yes, I’d love to.” Hermione set her teacup carefully down in its saucer on the table, and then tried to brush off the drops that had spilled out of it and onto her jeans as subtly as possible.

Malfoy stood up and then held out his arm to her. He’d been doing that all day, and it was discomfiting in a ways she wasn’t quite sure she wanted to address. He was treating her like someone he respected, and damned if that didn’t do something funny to her insides. She stood up and then tucked her arm into his. She felt as though he should be leading her into a ball instead of to his library, but it was probably just a pureblood custom she wasn’t aware of.

He led her upstairs, then down another large hall – *is everything in the Manor outsized?* – and finally into a room that was better than anything she could have dreamed up. It was difficult to tell the exact shape because of the bookshelves which covered all of the walls. Two massive staircases curved gently upward to another level, and spiral staircases led from there to a third story. Free-standing bookshelves formed aisles on the first two levels, while the third story was more of a balcony. Wrought iron railings lined the upper two levels. In the open area between the door and the bookshelves some groupings of tables and chairs were scattered, and a single large fireplace took up part of the wall to the left. A light haze of magic seemed to permeate the room, seeping from the leather-bound tomes that filled every available space.

“Merlin,” she breathed, overwhelmed.

She wandered forwards a few steps almost unconsciously and looked around. Part of her wanted to wander down those aisles and run her fingertips along the spines, but the vague thought that this wasn’t actually her library stopped her. Remembering that, she turned back to face Malfoy, who was leaning against the doorframe, smirking.

“This is incredible,” she told him.

His smirk grew. “It should be. Armand Malfoy, the first English Malfoy, started the library with the
books he brought over Normandy. Every Malfoy since has added to the collection.”

“Have you?”

Malfoy smirked and nodded. “Of course.” He pushed himself off the doorframe with his shoulders and then started walking toward the aisles of shelves. He glanced back and raised an eyebrow.

Hermione realized she’d been staring at his arse, so she shook her head and hurried to follow him. *I am absolutely not thinking about shagging Malfoy.*

Malfoy walked almost to the back of the room before stopping in front of a bookshelf full of books that didn’t have the same feel of seeping magic as the other shelves, and the books were brighter and newer. Not only that, but when Hermione stepped up next to him, she realized that they weren’t the leather-bound tomes that dominated wizarding libraries and bookshops, but hardback muggle books. She didn’t see any paperbacks, but she wasn’t surprised. Malfoys would have only the best.

Glancing through the titles immediately on display, she saw a much wider variety of writers than she would have anticipated. She spent several minutes looking through the shelves more thoroughly, eventually turning to look at him.

Malfoy was staring at her with something she would have called nerves on anyone else. She was sure he would have been biting his lip if it hadn’t been far too undignified.

“You bought these?” she asked.

He nodded. “I realized, after the war, that I needed to expand my point of view. So many things that I’d believed my entire life were because I’d never bothered to learn anything different. I accepted what I’d been told without reservation. I needed to learn how to question things.” He waved a hand at the bookshelf. “This was my way of doing that.”

“You’ve read all of these?”

“I have.”

*He really is trying to change.* “Did you like them?”

“Not all of them.” He shrugged one shoulder. “But I doubt anyone can be expected to love every book they read, perhaps with present company excepted.”

Hermione smiled ruefully. “I don’t love *every* book. But I do like most of them,” she admitted.

“Nothing wrong with that.” He smiled at her, and damned if it didn’t make butterflies start fluttering around in her stomach again.

*Now I’m thinking in clichés?*

“But I was going to show the books on Veela. This way.” He gestured gracefully with one arm while holding the other out to her.

Hermione looked at it askance. “You know you don’t need to escort me everywhere, don’t you?” If part of the reason she didn’t want to take his arm is because sparks tingled in her hand and spread to the rest of her body every time she touched him, she certainly wasn’t going to mention it.

Malfoy smirked. “But I want to.”

She had nothing at all to say to that, so she just took his arm mutely.
Malfoy very nearly grinned before gently leading her up the stairs to the second level and then around to a bookshelf dominated by books covered in pale leather covers, mostly shades of white and blue.

She removed her arm as delicately as she could once they’d come to a stop.

“Here we are,” Malfoy said. “It’s not a complete collection, but it’s quite extensive.”

Hermione began looking through the titles, but she was distracted by a large, very familiar looking, red tome. She pulled it off the shelf and *Veela Law* glittered up at her in large gold letters. She flipped open the front cover, but there was no bookplate with the Ministry seal. She turned to Malfoy. “You own this! Why did you bother coming to see me in my office?” she asked indignantly.

He shrugged. “I wasn’t sure what sort of books the Ministry had. I thought perhaps they might have a book that I didn’t.”

“But you said that you didn’t know that much about Veela law!”

Malfoy smirked. “Well I didn’t two months ago.”

“You visited me a week ago, not two months ago!”

“An oversight, I’m sure.”

*He is infuriating!* “You are infuriating! Why on earth would you lie about something like that?”

“I wasn’t lying,” he said mildly. “Merely being slightly anachronistic. And I really do have a more vested interest now than two months ago.”

“I’m sure,” Hermione said acidly. *I should have known he hadn’t changed that much. He still likes toying with people’s minds.* She replaced the book on the shelf gently, controlling her anger. She didn’t want to damage the book, but Malfoy’s face was another matter. Still, Hermione liked to think she had better control over her anger now. “If you’ll excuse me, I have to be going.”

She strode past Malfoy, only just keeping her shoulder from bumping his. *Bloody sparks.* She walked quickly down the stairs, and she was halfway across the floor to the door before Malfoy responded.

“Wait! Granger, wait!”

Like hell.

Hermione ignored him, choosing instead to continue channeling her anger into a very rapid walk to the front door. She hadn’t felt any Anti-Apparition wards, so when she stepped outside, she turned on her heel and Apparated away.

*****

On Monday morning, as she sat in her office, she could admit to herself that she hadn’t behaved very well the day before, and her response might have been slightly overdramatic. Still, the annoyance over his apparent disregard for truth and honesty lingered.

She applied herself to her work vigorously to distract herself. It worked quite well, considering she hadn’t managed to get much done that weekend and quite a bit had accumulated in that time. Felicity popped in several times, and Hermione was reminded of her decision to resign. After everyone had
left for the day, Hermione lingered.

Malfoy’s case, and Malfoy himself, had distracted her for far longer than she’d anticipated. She’d told Harry of her plan to resign nearly a month ago and nearly forgotten about it since then. With that in mind, she pulled out the draft of her resignation letter and read it over.

Hermione still wasn’t sure what she would do if she resigned. She did like working at the Department for Magic Creatures, but the endless paperwork her job as Department Head entailed wasn’t exactly mentally stimulating. Her boredom had been alleviated for a while, but it was starting to return.

She glanced back at the letter. She hadn’t signed it, and the end wasn’t quite finished.

Making up her mind, Hermione added a small clause at the end and then signed it with a flourish. She felt better with the letter signed.

For the first time in several months, Hermione went home with a smile on her face.

Tuesday morning, Hermione went up to the Minister’s office first thing, clutching her old leather briefcase. The secretary looked surprised to see her.

“Miss Granger!”

“Hello. Is the Minister available? I’d like to speak with him.”

The secretary, whose name Hermione could never remember, glanced down at a thick notebook and then back up. “He’s free for the next thirty minutes, you can go on in.”

Hermione smiled slightly. “Thank you.” She walked in, and wasn’t surprised to see that Kingsley didn’t look surprised to see her.

“Hermione, please come in.” He waved a hand which indicated both the leather chairs in front of his desk and closed the door behind her.

Hermione walked in and then stood in front of his desk.

“Hello, Kingsley.”

She saw when he noted that she remained standing. “What’s this about?”

Hermione Summoned her resignation from her briefcase and then handed it to him. “I am submitting my official letter of resignation as Head of the Department for Magical Creatures.”

Kingsley looked at her in shock. “You’re resigning.”

She nodded firmly. “Yes. You’ll notice that I’ve included a clause saying that I will stay on to finish my open cases before leaving. I’ve decided on Felicity McAllan as my replacement – she’s very capable.”

“Of course I trust your judgement, Hermione. I just hadn’t realized you were even thinking about resigning. What brought this on?”

Hermione took a breath. She’d prepared for this question. “I’ve decided that the position no longer suits me. I believe that Miss McAllan will be able to lead the department very efficiently for many
Kingsley frowned. “You needn’t give me the political answer. I think we’ve been through enough to
work past that.”

Hermione smiled slightly. “Yes, of course.” She shrugged. “I just don’t find the work satisfying
anymore. I need something a little more…challenging, I suppose.”

Kingsley sighed deeply. “I can wish you’d reconsider, but I doubt that I’ll convince you. In that case,
I accept your resignation in the terms you’ve laid out.”

“You’re welcome. Good luck, Hermione.”

Hermione nodded and then left the office, glad that she’d finally taken the last step toward a new
stage in her life, even if it wasn’t starting right away.

When Hermione returned to her office, she called Felicity in.

“Felicity, come in, sit down.”

Felicity did, looking at her expectantly.

“What did you want to see me about?”

Do you remember that conversation we had a while ago?”

“You mean about the Penthurst case?” Felicity looked confused.

Hermione shook her head. “No, about me resigning and you being my replacement.”

Felicity immediately perked up. “Yes, of course!”

“I handed in my official resignation today. I’ll close out my open cases, and then you’ll take over as
Department Head,” Hermione said without fanfare.

Felicity blinked. “Wow. Well, I hadn’t realized it would be so soon, or so sudden, but thank you. I
won’t let you down.”

Hermione smiled. “I know you won’t.”

*****

The next day at quarter to twelve, Hermione found herself dithering in the corridor in front of
Harry’s office. She’d lifted her hand to knock three times without actually touching the wood.
Fortunately, the Aurors in the nearest cubicles had apparently gone out to lunch and so no one was
around to witness her indecision.

On the fourth attempt, after a deep breath, or three, she finally rapped on the door. A long moment
passed where she worried that Harry might already have gone to lunch before a muffled voice said,
“Come in.”

Hermione opened the door and then poked her head in nervously. Harry glanced up briefly from the
paperwork spread across his desk, and then his head jerked up again.

“Hermione! I wasn’t expecting you!”

Hermione bit her lip. *Maybe this wasn’t a good idea.* “I know, can I come in?”

“Of course!” Harry stood up quickly, nearly knocking over an inkwell precariously close to the edge of his desk.

She closed the door carefully behind her before perching on the edge of one of the seats.

“Er, hi.” *Hi? Oh bloody hell, I’ve turned into a thirteen-year-old.* “How are you?”

Harry rubbed a hand through his hair. “I’m, uh, I’m good. How are you?”

“Uh, good.” *Is this even a conversation?* “I wanted to, um, to ask you…”

“Yes?” Harry said quickly.

*Why am I so nervous?* “That is, do you want to go, um, get lunch?”

Harry stared at her and she began to wonder if this hadn’t been a terrible idea.

“Unless you’ve already eaten? That would be fine, of course. I can go get lunch myself.” Hermione realized she was babbling and cut herself off, standing up.

“No! I mean, yes! I mean, I’m hungry!” Harry ran another hand through his hair, mumbling something she couldn’t quite hear. “What I meant to say, was no, I haven’t eaten, and yes, I’d like to get lunch with you.”

“Oh, well, great.” *This is bloody awkward.* “The usual place, then?”

“Yeah, sounds, uh, sounds good.” He looked around and then grabbed his outer robe from where it had been flung over the back of his chair. He slipped it on and then looked at her. “Lead the way.”

Chapter End Notes

Let me know your thoughts!
Seams

Chapter Summary

Harry wasn't sure if he wanted time to slow down or speed up.

Chapter Notes

Oh you lovely people! Thank you so much to everyone who commented/followed/left kudos! I write for you guys, so your kind words and your support mean so much to me :D I decided to hurry up and post a chapter this week because of you all are so amazing!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

As Harry followed Hermione out of the Ministry and into Diagon Alley, he was uncomfortably aware that it had been over a week since he’d seen her. He couldn’t help but notice as he walked behind her that she looked good. Very good. He’d never really had a reason to appreciate the fact that Hermione resisted the Ministry dress code by wearing very smart muggle clothes, but he found himself more than a little interested in the way her bum filled out the tight knee-length skirt and the black stockings she wore underneath. Oh great, get aroused right before you sit down to lunch with her. Fantastic. Harry was grateful that as an Auror, he was forced to wear the Ministry-mandated robes. They were thick and designed to provide a barrier against spells, but they worked equally well at hiding inopportune erections.

Harry wasn’t surprised when Hermione led him to the little café they usually went to. It was a bit crowded, but they managed to squeeze into a table at the back. After the waiter had come and taken their orders, Hermione flicked her wand to raise privacy wards.

“So, uh, how have you been?” Harry asked. Oh fucking brilliant. You sound like a fourth year who’s never talked to a girl.

“I’ve been…good.” She fiddled with her fork. “I resigned,” she blurted out.

“Wait, what? You’re leaving the Ministry?” Harry asked, an edge of panic tinging his question.

“Oh, um, not yet.” She blew out a breath and then placed both hands in her lap. “I’m finishing out my open cases and then I’ll leave. I’m leaving Felicity in charge. You remember her? I mentioned her to you a few weeks ago. She’s really nice, and I’m sure she’ll do really well and she’ll be great for the department, of course.” Hermione abruptly cut off, her cheeks turning ever so slightly pink. “But how, uh, how have you been, Harry?”

He cleared his throat. “Good, I’ve been good. Busy. Really busy. The charges against Dunham should go to the Wizengamot next week.”

“Oh! So you’ve gotten the case ready?”

“Yeah, I was going to owl you, actually. You’ll have to testify, if you don’t mind.” Harry felt much
more comfortable now that they were discussing work.

“Of course. But I haven’t had a chance to check Dunham’s work yet. Not thoroughly. And I’ll probably need an expert in Potions and one in Charms to go through the journals with me. There’s so much going on that I’d need someone to help sort out the bits of the spell and the ritual and the potion he was using. I’ve checked some of his Arithmantic equations, but they don’t make sense out of context.” She tapped her fingers against the table. “It’s really frustrating, actually. I hate the thought that some insane murderer is outsmarting me.”

Harry smiled at her reassuringly. “I think the insanity rules out any cleverness. You probably can’t sort it out because it doesn’t make sense. But I’ll ask Robards if he knows any Potions or Charms people who are discreet who would be able to consult.”

“That’d be great, Harry.” Hermione smiled brightly at him.

He absolutely would not admit that little butterflies took up residence in his stomach. He was just a bit hungry, that was all.

When their food arrived a few moments later, before the silence that had descended could become awkward, Harry was very grateful. They both tucked in, but out of the corner of his eye, Harry could see Hermione fiddling with her unused spoon and her water glass and knew that she was building up the nerve to talk. About, well, everything, he supposed.

“I went to Malfoy Manor this weekend.”

Harry jerked his head up so fast he might have given himself whiplash. “What?” That was not what he’d expected to hear.

“Malfoy invited me,” Hermione said quietly. “He sent me a note a few hours after I received his invitation to the Samhain Ball. He said he wanted to give me the chance to…confront my demons, as it were.”

Harry sat there dumbfounded for a moment before reaching out to take the hand that was clutching her fork so tightly her knuckles were white. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

Why didn’t I think of her when I got the invitation? I should have known she’d get one too! He knew that she still had nightmares about that day. She’d told him a year or so ago after a maudlin night spent drinking muggle whisky and reminiscing and remembering.

“I don’t know,” she said, in a way which suggested that wasn’t quite true. “I just, I suppose I didn’t know what to tell you. But I went.”

He stroked his thumb over the back of her hand. “Are you okay?”

She shrugged. “I think so. It wasn’t fun, of course, but it felt…not good, exactly, but there were demons that I don’t suppose I’d ever really faced and I got to face them.”

“I would have been there for you, you know that.”

She nodded. “I know. But this was something I needed to do alone.”

“And Malfoy let you do that?”

Her mouth twisted. “He was surprisingly mature about the whole thing. Well, for a while.”
He recognized the look in her eyes. *That fucker.* “What did he do?” he asked angrily, though he carefully kept his grip gentle.

She sighed heavily. “Nothing, I suppose. Not really. He was a just a giant prat.”

*I can’t arrest him for that. Pity.* “Do you want me to go talk to him?”

Hermione smiled at him again, although it was dimmer than it had been earlier. “I appreciate the thought, but no, Harry. You know you could be suspended. And besides, I’m sure Kingsley has you on security for the Ball, so you’ll have to play nice with him.”

Harry pouted over dramatically, eliciting a small chuckle. “I suppose. And Kingsley has me on ‘make nice’ duty more than security.”

“Figures,” she said.

Harry noticed that Hermione had yet to withdraw her hand. That bolstered his courage enough for him to ask his next question with studied nonchalance. “Are you going with anyone?”

Hermione’s puzzled look followed by a slight blush told him that she’d guessed his motive. “Um, no, I don’t think so.”

Harry resolutely ignored the fact that he could feel the tips of his ears turning red. “You could come with me. Might keep you from being bored. And that way you’ll only be seated next to one pompous Wizengamot windbag.”

Hermione batted her eyelashes. “Why Harry Potter, are you asking me to the Samhain Ball?”

Harry rubbed his free hand through his hair. “S’pose I am. Are you saying yes?”

She smirked. “Only so I don’t have to listen to two windbags.”

Harry grinned, feeling lighter than he had in ages. Very carefully, making deliberate eye contact, he lifted her hand to his mouth and brushed a kiss across the back. “I look forward to it.”

*****

The next week and a half passed in a rush of trying to sort out getting Malfoy’s case to trial and arranging security for the Samhain Ball. Mostly that meant endless meetings.

He met with Robards four times in eight days. Harry interviewed Dunham one more time, but he’d descended so far into madness that Harry didn’t get any more information. Aurors who’d been sent back to the abandoned house where they’d found Malfoy had uncovered the bodies of the four victims Hermione had mentioned buried behind the house. They’d been given proper burials in a Ministry graveyard. Hermione and Harry, as well as the other Aurors assigned to the raid, had attended the short service given for all of them, and Malfoy had made a short, surprising appearance as well. He hadn’t spoken to either of them, but Harry swore he could feel Malfoy’s eyes even though every time he looked over, Malfoy was looking somewhere else.

Hermione had owled him new information as she went through the diaries, and they had more than enough information to put Dunham in Azkaban for life. One of the things Hermione had lobbied for, before she settled into working at the Department for Magical Creatures, was an end to Dementors at Azkaban. Due to all the bad memories from the war, she’d been successful. Because of that, the harshest penalty a witch or wizard could receive was a life sentence in Azkaban, which was a still a gloomy and depressing place even without the Dementors.
Dunham’s trial was set to begin the day after Samhain.

When Harry wasn’t busy with Malfoy’s case, he was busy coordinating security for the Ball. Even though it was being held at the Manor and hosted by Malfoy, so far Harry had only spoken with Narcissa Malfoy, who was apparently in charge of managing the Ball. Harry had visited Malfoy Manor several times, and each time, it was Narcissa who met him and showed him around and allowed him to cast whatever spells he needed and then served him tea before he left.

Despite the fact that Narcissa Malfoy had saved Harry’s life all those years ago, they hadn’t developed a relationship that could be termed anything more than “very polite.” Harry respected her, but he hadn’t made any efforts to befriend her. The exchanged niceties when they crossed paths and no more. At least she’s not bad to work with.

As the week dragged on and the Ball drew closer, Harry found himself anticipating seeing Malfoy again. He hadn’t seen him but for that one time and hadn’t spoken to him at all since that Friday night nearly three weeks ago.

He and Hermione went out for lunch almost every day. They talked a lot about the case, but they also did something someone might have called flirting if it weren’t so terribly awkward.

The weekend before the Ball, Harry did something he usually avoided at all costs – went clothes shopping. He’d owled Ginny and asked for her help. Normally he went alone, but he was terrible at buying formal robes, and even he had to admit, reluctantly, that Ginny was useful for shopping. She’d sent back an enthusiastic agreement and they’d arranged to meet Sunday afternoon at the Leaky Cauldron.

Harry Apparated to the Leaky ten minutes late after trying to figure out what one should wear to go clothes shopping, failing, and then ending up in trainers, jeans, and a t-shirt. Ginny, who was leaning against the wall by the Diagon Alley door of the Leaky, rolled her eyes when he popped into view.

“I don’t know why I bother, really I don’t. You’re hopeless, Harry.” She smirked at him before giving him a hug.

Harry ran a hand through his hair, absently trying to pat it down. “Hey, Ginny. Thanks for doing this.”

Ginny tucked her arm through his and then started dragging him down the street. “Nonsense. You know I’m happy to help.” She gave him a very not-subtle once-over out of the corner of her eye. “You desperately need it.”

Harry looked down at his clothes. “Er, yeah, probably.”

“Not probably, darling. Definitely.”

Ginny kept up a running stream of conversation as she dragged him down the street and into a new tailor that was called “Bespoke and Befitting.” The shop windows held several mannequins wearing wizarding robes that looked far too fashionable to be comfortable. Harry grimaced.

“Ginny, are you sure about this place?”

Ginny looked in the direction of his gaze before rolling her eyes. “Yes, now come on.”

She pulled him inside and then walked up to the counter to talk to the young man standing there.
Harry stood there awkwardly while they chatted. The man, who was wearing robes that were finer than anything in Harry’s wardrobe, glanced over at him before clucking and turning back to Ginny.

*Just because I like to be comfortable doesn’t mean there’s anything wrong with the way I dress.* Harry tried to tell himself that when yet another man in a suit came out and walked over to Harry. He was older than the man at the counter and his dark brown hair had a few threads of silver.

The man held out his hand. “Daniel Blishwick.”

Harry shook his hand. He didn’t recognize the man, but the last name was vaguely familiar. “Harry Potter.”

The man’s mouth quirked, and Harry didn’t need to guess why.

“Pleased to meet you. If you’d follow me, we can start your fitting.”

Ginny gave him a little wiggle of her fingers that clearly meant he should follow Blishwick and then grinned at him. “Have fun!”

Harry frowned at her before following Blishwick into a back room.

Blishwick guided him onto a small raised platform. He Summoned a measuring tape and then starting flicking his wand to direct it.

“So, Miss Weasley was a bit vague on what exactly you were looking for. If you wouldn’t mind filling me in?”

Harry was grateful for the slight distraction from the strangely snake-like tape wrapping around various portions of his body.

“Well, the, uh, the Ministry ball is coming up. For Samhain, that is. And I realized that I needed new dress robes.” Which wasn’t quite true. Harry had a perfectly decent set of dress robes hanging in his closet. Sure they were six years old and a little short and a bit ragged around the edges from repeated use of *Scourgify* to clean them. *Okay, maybe I do need new robes.* And not that Harry would say, but he did want something that was maybe a little more flattering. Not that he was trying to impress anyone. *Definitely not.*

“I see.” Blishwick flicked his wand again and the tape flew back to its spot and then a column of bright blue numbers blinked into existence, floating next to him. Another flick of his wand and the numbers transferred themselves into neat lines of black ink on a piece of parchment that Blishwick held. “Do you have any preference for the dress robes?”

“Well, if they could be comfortable, that would be good.” Harry resisted the urge to run a hand through his hair. At least Blishwick wasn’t as judgmental as some of the tailors Harry had visited. He had yet to make any comment on Harry’s current attire.

Blishwick blinked and then nodded. “I will take that into account. I meant more particularly if you had a preference for color or style?”

Harry felt a blush creep up his neck. “Oh, right. Uh, not really. I’m not sure I know much about dress robe styles.”

“We’ll go classic, then.” Blishwick flicked his wand at the back wall, which consisted entirely of shelves devoted to bolts of fabric. Black fabric floated towards them. “You say that you need them for Samhain, so I will have to work a bit more quickly than I usually do.” For the first time, his voice
sounded disapproving.

“Er, sorry about that.” While he was glad that Blishwick wasn’t giving him special treatment because he was the Chosen One or the Savior, Harry did feel bad about him having to accommodate him anyway. “Will they be ready?”

Blishwick gave a delicate shrug. “You don’t require anything extravagant, so it won’t be terribly difficult. I should be able to finish them today. Although you will have to extend your appointment.”

“Of course, no problem,” Harry rushed to say.

Blishwick smiled slightly. “Have a seat, Mister Potter.”

He waited until Harry had done so and then started twirling his wand through the air, manipulating the bolts of fabric. A green bolt joined the two black ones that had floated over earlier and the three twisted around each other in a dance that was nearly mesmerizing. After a while, several large pieces cut themselves off the rolls and then the bolts floated back to their place on the wall. The parchment that held the numbers floated gently into the air beside the twisting mass of fabric and Blishwick seemed to look at both at the same time as he worked.

Harry watched from a chair pushed against the same wall as the shelves that contained various measuring tapes and bits of equipment Harry wasn’t sure about. There was a table next the chair which held several wizarding magazines as well as a copy of that day’s Daily Prophet. Harry picked up Quidditch Monthly and flipped through it, dividing his attention between that and watching Blishwick.

After what must have been more than an hour, Blishwick stepped back and dabbed lightly at his forehead with a handkerchief he pulled from the air before Banishing it again. Harry watched as he walked around what was now very clearly a set of robes, inspecting it closely, occasionally flicking his wand to adjust something. Finally he stood up and gestured to Harry.

“Please try these on, Mister Potter,” Blishwick instructed.

Harry walked over and he didn’t have time to awkwardly request Blishwick turn around or something because he’d already left, closing the door behind him. Harry quickly changed into the robes, leaving his clothes on the chair he’d been sitting on. Harry wasn’t sure how, but Blishwick returned at the exact moment he finished slipping into the outer robe.

“If you wouldn’t mind, Mister Potter,” he said, gesturing at the platform.

Harry quickly stepped up, only just avoiding tripping on the hem of the robe.

Blishwick raised an eyebrow but otherwise didn’t comment. He then walked around Harry as he had around the robes before.

“If you don’t mind, Mister Potter, I will make some adjustments. You may feel some slight tugging or pulling on the fabric.” He raised his wand in expectation.

“Oh course.” Harry purposefully kept his hands loose, avoiding the temptation of reaching for the wand that was strapped to a holster on his forearm.

Blishwick then began a series of adjustments and the sensation of fabric pulling and tightening and loosening was indeed quite strange.

Finally Blishwick stepped back. He walked around Harry once more before nodding sharply. He
Levitated a large full-length mirror from its place leaning against the wall and moved it in front of Harry.

“What do you think, Mister Potter?”

Harry stared at himself in the mirror, only just keeping from gaping. He hadn’t really thought a pair of nice robes could make that much of a difference in how he saw himself, but he looked like a completely different person. Even though the robes were mostly black, they looked nothing like the heavy black Auror robes he wore on a daily basis. These were smooth and shimmered with a pattern that seemed to shift and swirl, drawing the eye to what Harry personally considered some of his better features, and even managing to make his hair look less messy, somehow.

“These are great, Mister Blishwick,” Harry said sincerely.

Blishwick smiled, more than he had the entire visit. “Excellent. I’ll have these sent to your house. You can arrange everything with Alan at the counter. Have a good day, Mister Potter.”

Blishwick shook his hand again before leaving Harry alone to change.

*****

The day of Samhain, Harry woke up excited but also with what felt like a lump of lead in his stomach. He went through his morning routine almost without thought. It wasn’t until he was tying the laces on his trainers that he felt his mind catch up with his body and his chest tightened. He finished tying his shoe aggressively and then stood up. He grabbed a jumper and pulled it on before gripping his wand and Apparating.

Like he had every year since the war, Harry Apparated to Godric’s Hollow. He walked slowly down the lane that was quiet this early. The nearly-silent pop that accompanied his Apparation, a consequence of Auror training, had not disturbed the early morning stillness. At the end of the road, a wrought iron gate rose up, interrupting a low stone wall. Harry walked through, feeling the faint brush of magic that recognized him as a wizard. He walked the well-worn path to his parents’ grave and then sat on the ground in front of the cold slab of marble. He cast a Warming charm before tucking his wand away.

He brushed his fingers over the carved letters, letting the sadness and pain come. Hermione and Ron had both offered to come with him back when he’d started doing this, but he’d told them he didn’t want company. This was something he needed to do alone. As he sat there, he allowed the tears to drip down his cheeks, rubbing them away every once in a while with the sleeve of his jumper.

He wasn’t sure how long he sat there, but it was long enough for him to purge his soul of some of the dark feelings that had built up in the year since he’d last visited. Even though he’d enjoyed seeing more of Malfoy than he had in years, his presence had also stirred up bad memories from the war. He was sure the same was true for Hermione. He thought of her face when she’d talked about her visit to Malfoy Manor. Well, maybe she hasn’t been enjoying his company.

Finally, he rose. As he did every year before he left, he conjured a wreath of white lilies in front of their gravestone, just as Hermione had done all those years ago. He rested his hand against the cold stone for a moment before turning around and leaving the cemetery.

For the first time, he had something to look forward to on what was usually the saddest day of his year. Harry walked down the lane with a hint of a spring in his step, and as he Disapparated, he
thought that his parents would like to see that he was moving forward.

Chapter End Notes

A quick question for you all: next up is Draco and we'll finally be getting into the ball, but first, do you want to see a bit of Hermione getting ready? I have an idea for a scene with Ginny and Hermione which could be quite fun ;) It wouldn't be a full chapter, just a little something before we finally get to see all three of them together again.

So? Thoughts? And let me know what you thought of this chapter as well!
I counted up the comments, and more people wanted a little scene between Hermione and Ginny, so here it is! It got a little longer than I expected, but I hope you guys enjoy :) I promise a long chapter about the main event is coming up soon! Draco's up next, but for now, here's Hermione...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hermione glared at Ginny.

“What?” Ginny looked at her with an expression Hermione was sure she must have practiced in the mirror to be so absolutely innocent.

Hermione kept glaring.

“Oh darling, please.” Ginny rolled her eyes and stepped fully out of the hearth, waving her wand to Banish the light coating of soot. “You need my help and you know it.”

“I do not!”

Hermione had received an owl from Ginny an hour ago saying she was coming by to help her get ready for the Samhain Ball. Hermione had owled her back and said she didn’t need help. Ginny’s response had been to send her a pair of heels that Hermione was sure had to be illegal somewhere.

“Hermione, the ball starts in three hours and you haven’t even done anything with your hair yet.” Ginny gave her a look of mixed pity and disappointment.

Hermione touched her hair. “Three hours is plenty of time,” she muttered defensively.

“For me, yes.” Ginny flicked her long, shiny red hair back. “For you? Since you won’t let me teach you any beauty charms? No.”

“I’ve gotten ready for plenty of events in less than three hours, Ginny.” Which was absolutely true. But you didn’t care about impressing anyone at those events.

Ginny rolled her eyes. “Of course, and that’s fine for most Ministry events. Anyway, I brought you a dress.” Ginny pulled something out of her pocket and then enlarged it to its full size, revealing that it was a garment bag.

Hermione glared at the bag. She must have an unending supply of those.

“I don’t need a dress,” Hermione protested. “I have one!”

Ginny walked by her and started toward Hermione’s bedroom. “Is it one of those horrid dresses you wear to charity balls when the Minister wants to show you off?”

Hermione followed Ginny into her bedroom in time to see Ginny gently lay the garment bag on her bed. “It’s not. I bought it specifically for the Ball.”
Ginny spun around dramatically. “You went shopping?”

“Yes,” Hermione replied warily.

“Without me?”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “I am perfectly capable of shopping without you, Ginny.”

“That’s what Harry says as well. You, at least, manage to wear something decent on a day-to-day basis. Harry would be hopeless if the Aurors didn’t have a uniform. But you are both useless when it comes to dress robes.” Ginny perched one hand on her hip and waved her other hand. “Alright then, let’s see this dress.”

Hermione sighed and then turned to her closet, pulling out the dress she’d bought a couple days ago. She held it up on the hanger for Ginny’s inspection, turning it so she could see the back as well.

Ginny scrunched her nose. “Well, it’s better than I expected. But Hermione, it looks like something you’d wear to scheduled drinks at a business conference. Why is it navy blue? And have long sleeves? It’s Samhain, not a funeral.”

Hermione looked at the dress. It was modest, sure, but only by Ginny’s standard. And it was perfectly appropriate for a Department Head at a Ministry function.

“I’m representing the department, I can hardly dress like a tart,” Hermione retorted.

“I would never dress you like a tart!” Ginny placed an offended hand over her heart.

Hermione felt she did very well by restraining a comment about that dress Ginny had squeezed her into on that night out.

“Now put that away and look at this.” Ginny grinned at her and then turned to the garment bag.

Hermione blew out a breath and returned the dress to her closet and then reluctantly walked over to the bed to stand next to Ginny.

Ginny unzipped the bag and then pulled out one of the two dresses inside. She held up it, smiling widely. “So? What do you think?”

Hermione stared at it.

“I got a muggle dress, because I know how much you hate robes-”

“I don’t hate robes,” Hermione muttered.

Ginny ignored her comment. “And I found this dress at this fabulous shop in muggle London. Blaise helped me with the money, he’s really quite brilliant at those sorts of things, and then I got it tailored in Diagon Alley.”

“Blaise helped you? And you know my measurements?” Hermione shook her head. Wrong things to focus on. “I absolutely will not be wearing that!”

Hermione crossed her arms. She had to admit, the dress was gorgeous. But it was the principle of the thing.

“Of course you will. It’s fabulous and it will look fabulous on you.”
“I can’t let you buy me dresses, and I’m sure that dress cost more money than I make in a month.” Hermione could see the label and it was a designer she would never be able to afford.

“All the more reason you should let me buy you dresses.” Ginny held out the dress, admiring it. “I make enough money to buy you a dress for every Ministry function and still have enough left over to buy us both plates at a charity ball of your choice.”

Hermione folded her arms more thoroughly and glared at Ginny.

Ginny sighed, laying the dress down and then perching on the edge of the bed. “Hermione. It’s a dress. I like getting all dressed up, and I like helping my friends get all dressed up. You’re the only one who makes this big a fuss over looking nice at a function. And yes, technically the Samhain Ball is a Ministry function,” she said, interrupting the protest Hermione had been about to make, “but everyone knows the seasonal festivals are when even the purebloods let their hair down. And since this is the first official Samhain ball since the war… Trust me, you’ll see people tonight in more compromising positions than at any club I’ve ever taken you to.”

Hermione looked at Ginny’s serious expression, then at the dress, then back at Ginny. She rolled her eyes. “Fine. I’ll wear the dress.”

Ginny leaped up and squealed. “Fantastic! I’ll get the wine!”

Two and a half hours later, Hermione had to admit that Ginny did have really good taste in clothes. And surprisingly good taste in wine. A mostly-empty bottle of merlot sat on the dressing table next to a half-empty bottle of Sleekeazy’s.

Hermione had been primped and polished with a combination of spells and potions, and Hermione had even let Ginny teach her a few beauty charms.

Looking in the mirror, she touched one of the large ringlets that was draped artfully over one shoulder. Ginny had sprayed her entire head with something like hairspray that would keep everything intact and would keep any stray *Finite* from ruining the spells keeping her hair from frizzing up.

Ginny had also managed to get ready in between using Hermione as a dress-up doll. The other dress in the bag had been her own, and she looked gorgeous.

While Hermione was examining herself in the mirror, trying to see if she could see a sign that magic had been used to apply the kohl lining both of her eyes, Ginny’s head appeared over her shoulder.

“You look fantastic. He won’t be able to keep his eyes off you.”

Hermione spun around, nearly catching her heel in the weave of the carpet. “Who?”

Ginny laughed. “Harry of course. He is the one taking you to ball, isn’t he?” Ginny’s eyes lit up. “Or is there someone else you’re trying to impress?”

*Oh fuck, I shouldn’t have said anything!* “No, of course not. I’m not trying to impress anyone. Not Harry, either.”

Ginny patted her arm, still grinning maniacally. “Of course not, darling.”

Hermione was extremely glad for the chime of the doorbell at that moment. “That’ll be Harry.”
“I’ll get it!” Ginny said, sailing out of the room, wine glass in one hand.

Hermione followed more slowly. Even though she’d cast a Steadying charm on the heels Ginny had sent over, which matched the dress perfectly, she didn’t want to accidentally twist an ankle before even leaving her flat.

When Hermione reached the living room, where she could hear voices, Harry turned to look at her.

“Hey Hermi…uh…” Harry trailed off with his jaw hanging open.

“Harry? Do I look alright?” Hermione looked down at her dress. Even though she’d agreed to wear it, and she did think she looked alright, she was worried by Harry’s apparent inability to speak.

Ginny walked over and slung an arm around her waist. “You look amazing, I told you that already.”

Harry snapped his mouth closed. “Yeah, you, uh, you look good, Hermione.” He raised a hand to his hair but stopped before he actually ran his fingers through his hair. “Bloody fantastic, actually.”


“Are you, uh, ready to go?”

Hermione forcibly dragged her mind out of the gutter. “Yes, I just need to get my purse.” She nearly fled from the room, not even needing to focus on her balance.

In her bedroom, she took a few deep breaths, smoothed her dress, grabbed a little clutch Ginny had bought for her last year, and then walked back out to the living room. Harry was standing in front of the hearth, cheeks pink, with his hands stuffed in his pockets. Ginny looked like the cat who’d got the cream.

“Ready,” she said nervously. She glanced at Ginny. “Oh! Are you going with Blaise? Are you waiting for him?”

Ginny waved a hand, grinning. “He’s meeting me there. Don’t worry about me, darlings. I’ll see you there!” With a very loud crack, she was gone.

Harry cleared his throat and then offered her his arm. “All set?”

Hermione laid a hand on his arm, reminded strongly of Draco’s strong arm leading her around the Manor. Very deep trouble. She shivered. “Yes.”

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? Feelings? Let me know!
As he walked around the Manor one last time, Draco couldn’t help but be satisfied with how well the event had come together. Although his mother had been rightly irritated that he’d waited so late to begin planning such an event, not that she’d said so directly, she had done a magnificent job. The food was elegantly laid out on a long table at one end of the ballroom under a light stasis charm, the band was warming up on a dais at the other end, the house elves were all in neatly-pressed pillowcases embroidered with the newly altered Malfoy crest, the human waiters that had been hired were in neatly pressed suits, and the candelabra were illuminated with hundreds of candles. As he did a final check of the ballroom, he was pleased to note that his mother had heeded his request – touches of red and gold accented the otherwise black and white décor. He didn’t really want to harken back to their school days, but he did want to make Potter and Granger feel comfortable, and he thought that a slight touch of the Gryffindor colors might make them nostalgic.

Although the invites listed ten o’clock as the official start time, Draco was standing in the large foyer of the Manor at half nine, knowing that many of the social climbers and lower-level Ministry lackeys would arrive early in the hopes of making a good impression. In years past, and even a week ago, he would have expected to see Granger early as well, solely because she was excruciatingly polite rather than because she felt the need to suck up to her bosses, but he wasn’t at all sure that would be the case anymore.

After the mess he’d made of her visit to the Manor, Draco had half expected Granger to rescind her acceptance, but he hadn’t heard from her or seen her at all since her visit two weeks ago. While there was still the possibility she would skip the ball without any notice, he was holding out hope that her sense of duty would force her to come whether she was angry at him or not.

After five minutes standing in the entry hall, his mother at his side, shoulders straight and faces impassive like perfect pureblood hosts, the first guests arrived.

The time crawled, with Draco greeting the steady stream of guests and then sending them onto the ballroom where the band had begun playing some generic tunes designed to ease conversation until the party really got going.
When ten o’clock came, Draco looked carefully down the line of guests which had begun to form, looking for a bushy head of hair or a head of messy dark hair, disappointed not to see either one. His Veela was itching under his skin, anxious for him to be near his mates. The mating pains had returned with a vengeance two days ago, and he’d only been able to function with a healthy dose of extra-strength Pain Potion every few hours. He had his wings out, but they were tucked neatly against his back. More than a few guests stared at them as they shook hands.

When five more minutes had gone by without any sign of Potter or Granger, Draco began to grow worried that they wouldn’t appear at all. As preoccupied as he was, he was surprised when a familiar face appeared in front of him.

“Weasley?”

The female ginger in front of him rolled her eyes. “Well I suppose that’s better than Weaslette. I am dating your best friend, you should probably get used to seeing me around, Malfoy.”

“Of course, Miss Weasley. Thank you for coming,” he said politely. Even though his surprise at seeing her had distracted him for a moment, he couldn’t help his gaze flickering to the line again.

“Looking for someone?”

Draco snapped his gaze back to the redhead, who was now smirking, realizing belatedly that he still hadn’t released her hand. He dropped it abruptly and then flushed slightly. “I apologize.”

“No worries. I recognize that look. I’ve seen it on a few faces recently, in fact,” she said, reaching over and brushing his shoulder. When he stared at her, she smirked again. “Bit of lint.”

Draco was quite sure that there hadn’t been lint on his robes. “I’m sure I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Weasley nodded, her face serious. “Of course. But just in case you do, they should be here shortly.”

Draco stared at her.

“Thank you so much for hosting this party, Malfoy. I’m sure I’ll have a fantastic time.” She grinned at him and then turned to greet his mother before flouncing away.

Before the next guest could step up, his mother leaned over to him.

“What was that about, dear?” she said, her lips barely moving and her voice so quiet even Draco barely heard her.

“Nothing, of course,” Draco replied, equally quietly, voice calm. If anyone had known what to look for, the rustle of his wings would have given him away.

So intently was he looking for messy black hair and bushy brown hair that he was shocked when Granger and Potter appeared in front of him.

_Merlin’s fucking beard._

Potter had somehow managed to tame his hair, and the rest of him was equally polished in black robes that swirled with a faint pattern and had a lining of bright green satin. Granger had smoothed her hair into large ringlets that were swept over one shoulder, revealing a thin strap holding up the
royal blue muggle gown she wore. Draco wasn’t sure he’d ever seen anything more delectable than
the pair of them. He wanted to whisk them up to his rooms and lock them away for the next few
hours. Or days.

“Hello, Malfoy,” Potter said, holding out his hand.

Draco jerked, ashamed to realize he’d been so busy staring that he hadn’t greeted them yet. Oh well
done, Draco. Some host you’re being.

“Potter,” he said, reaching out to grip his hand. Potter’s hand was warm and dry and a tingle moved
from their joined hands up to his heart and down to his groin.

He released Potter’s hand, clearing his throat, and then turned to Granger. “Granger, I’m glad you
decided to come.”

“Malfoy.” Granger held out her hand, face perfectly bland. Draco was well aware that Granger
expected him to shake her hand, but he brought it to his lips instead, brushing a kiss across the back,
another tingle working its way through his body.

Granger jerked her hand back, glaring at him.

Draco nearly grinned. She still has her fire.

“Enjoy the party,” he said solicitously. He was quite sure that he didn’t fool either of them with his
feigned innocence.

They both turned to greet his mother, and Draco nearly choked when he realized that Granger’s
dress had no back, the line of fabric swooping down nearly to the bottom of her spine.

When they left to go into the ballroom, Draco groaned to himself at the thought that politeness
dictated that he had to greet guests until at least eleven. He surreptitiously checked his pocket watch
as the next guests approached and sighed when he realized that there was nearly forty-five minutes to
go.

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When he was finally able to leave the foyer, even though guests were still arriving, he walked as
quickly as possible to the ballroom, only making a quick stop to freshen his appearance and clean his
hands. There was something about Ministry workers and sweaty hands.

Although several rooms in the Manor had been opened to accommodate the ball –for gaming and
relaxing and privacy – Draco knew precisely where Potter and Granger were. His Veela could feel
them and was urging him forward.

Quite a few guests were scattered by the long buffet table and clustered around the tall tables set up
nearby, and a few more were seated at the tables lining the ballroom, providing places to rest, but
most of the guests were dancing to the lively tune the band was playing. Potter and Granger were
among those dancing. Draco could see the flash of Granger’s dress even through the vibrantly-
dressed throng.

Draco walked slowly along the side, chatting politely, before finally finding himself standing beside
Astoria Greengrass. She looked up at him with her big blue eyes and blinked before smiling.

“Hello, Draco,” she said.
“Astoria, how is your evening?”

“It’s been rather quiet, but I’m quite enjoying myself.”

Draco made quick, surreptitious glance around. “Where are your sister and your mother?”

“Oh, they haven’t arrived yet. That’s why I’m enjoying myself.” She grinned up at him impishly.

Draco smirked. “I’ll be sure not to mention that when I see them.”

“Thank you. Naturally, if you did, I’d tell my mother that you told me you were thinking of pursuing Daphne.”

He turned to glare at her, only to find her laughing softly. He shook his head. “You are wicked, Astoria Greengrass.”

“But of course.” She smirked.

The band began another song, and seeing that Potter and Granger were still dancing, Draco turned to Astoria and offered his hand. “Would you care to dance, Miss Greengrass?”

Astoria placed her hand delicately in his. “Why thank you, Mister Malfoy, I would.”

Draco led her into the midst of the crowd and then placed his hands on her shoulder and hip, keeping them the appropriate distance apart for two young, unattached purebloods. Despite the fact that his mother had been actively pushing for a match between one of the Greengrass sisters, and that Astoria fit quite well into his arms and danced as well as a pureblood witch should, Draco thought of her as no more than a younger sister or a cousin; certainly not a prospective bride.

As he moved her smoothly around the floor, he couldn’t help but track the location of Potter and Granger. They were laughing several couples away, and Potter was leading Granger surprisingly skillfully. Astoria seemed content to dance quietly, only occasionally making a remark about another dancer, which left Draco with enough free time to calculate several ways to get nearer to Potter and Granger without actually stepping on anyone’s toes, literally or metaphorically.

“Draco,” Astoria said, recalling his attention.

“Yes?”

“While I appreciate your skill as a partner, I can’t help but notice that your attention has been otherwise occupied. Might I suggest asking the person you actually want to dance with?”

Astoria laughed softly at the look he gave her. “I did manage to survive Slytherin. I’d like to think that reading the body language of my dance partner is within my capabilities.”

Draco’s lip twitched halfway into a smile. “I had heard you were the clever sister.”

“Yes, of course. Now, why don’t you go ask Granger for a dance before you trip over your own feet trying to stare at her?”

Draco turned back to her, having been distracted by the sway of Granger’s gown, ready to make a scathing retort, but Astoria had already somehow guided them to the edge of the dance floor and removed herself from his hold. She smiled at him. “She doesn’t bite. Much.”

He smirked at Astoria. “I’m sure I am quite capable of asking for a dance.” I’m not scared of her.
Draco wasn’t entirely convinced by his own argument.

Draco waited until Potter and Granger had taken a break from dancing and Granger had had the opportunity to drink most of a glass of champagne before approaching the pair. Their body language suggested they weren’t a couple, but the way Potter couldn’t seem to keep his eyes off her for more than a few seconds, even while he was talking to some wizard Draco thought he recognized as being an Auror, suggested that they were well on their way there, even if they didn’t know it yet.

He walked up in clear view and nodded at her. “Good evening, Granger.”

Out of the corner of his eye, Draco noticed that Potter jerked slightly when he spoke.

“Malfoy.” Her grip tightened on her glass, but she the fact that she didn’t actually tell him to bugger off gave him hope.

He lowered his voice. “I wanted to apologize for my behavior when you last visited. I didn’t mean to deceive you. I was feeling rather uncomfortable and I’m afraid that I didn’t handle it very well. Please, forgive me.”

From anyone else, he wouldn’t have asked, but this was his mate. Knowing that she had been upset, and that it was his fault, had been eating at him for the last two weeks.

Granger stared at him for a long moment, and he started growing genuinely nervous that she wasn’t going to forgive him.

Finally she relented, sighing heavily. “I forgive you, Malfoy. I suppose we were both uncomfortable.” She took a long sip of her champagne, finishing it. A house elf immediately appeared to take the empty glass.

For a moment, Draco was reminded of her hand on his cheek, telling him that she’d forgiven him for much greater crimes.

Before Granger could find a way to extricate herself from the conversation, Draco held out his hand to her. “May I have this dance, Granger?”

She gaped at him before slowly placing her hand in his. Draco swept her out onto the floor before her brain could catch up with her body. The feel of her skin beneath his hand where it was settled on her back set his nerve endings on fire.

They danced in silence for a few moments, Draco imprinting the feel of her into his memory, before Granger looked up at him, consternation written clearly on her face. *She’s adorable when she’s confused.*

Draco interrupted whatever thought she was about to articulate. “You are an excellent dancer, Granger.” Which was true, but he also wanted to distract her from whatever thoughts were running through her mind.

“I – thank you.” She frowned at him.

Draco quickly realized that they key was keeping her off guard. It was also immensely entertaining. “How long have you and Potter been seeing each other?”

“That’s not, we aren’t –”
“But you two arrived together,” Draco stated, suffusing his voice with innocence.

“We did, but –”

“Coming to a seasonal festival together, well, I can’t imagine doing so with someone whom I wasn’t seeing.”

“We’re friends,” Granger said, almost desperately.

“I imagine most people who are seeing each other are friends.”

The song merged into a new one, the tempo increasing. Around them, Draco saw that the impropriety seasonal festivals were famous for had already started. He pulled Granger closer to him as they turned, leaning down to whisper into her ear before she could respond.

“But is that really all? And here I thought you were making such good progress. Did Potter not work up the nerve to kiss you again?” He lowered his voice even more. “To fuck you?” He made sure his lips brushed against the curve of her ear.

She shuddered in his arms and he couldn’t help the self-satisfied smirk that curled his lips.

Her voice was breathy when she replied. “It’s, it’s not like that.”

“Oh?” Draco said softly. He maneuvered them past a drunken couple spinning and giggling madly, keeping Granger pressed against him and subtly moving his hand lower. “Was it you who went to him? Were you the one to show up at his house? To kiss him? Did you beg him to take you to bed?” He ended with a light nip to her earlobe.

This time he felt her as she wobbled, nearly losing her footing.

“I, we, uh…”

He slid his hand lower still, his pinky just brushing the fabric of her dress. “He wants to do all those things to you, you know. With you. He’s watching us right now. He’s probably imagining whisking you away to some dark corridor.” He rubbed his thumb against her spine, reveling in the pants of her breath he could feel against his neck. “But you’re no fainting damsel are you? You want to kiss him, don’t you? You want him to fall apart because of you, to lose control.”

“Oh.”

Draco positioned them so that Potter had a clear view of them as they danced. “You two would be beautiful together.” Draco could feel himself responding to his own words. The thought of them together – the thought of watching them, of kissing them, of fucking them – was about to make him lose control. “You would be fucking perfect.” He pulled her in until there wasn’t a breath of air between them.

He pulled his head back enough to look around as he kept them spinning around the dance floor, half his attention always on Potter. He could feel Potter’s eyes burning into his back. When they spun again so that Draco was facing him, Potter was staring at them with barely-restrained lust. He could no doubt see the flush of Granger’s back that Draco could feel beneath his fingers.

When he finally looked down at Granger, her eyes were closed and her lips were parted. Slowly she opened her eyes, as if she could feel his eyes on her.

She shook her head slightly. “I, uh,” she took a deep breath, “I need a drink.”
Draco waited until the music transitioned to something slower so that he could more easily navigate between the dancing couples. He led her back to where Potter was still standing, although the wizard he’d been talking to was nowhere to be seen. When they came to a stop, a human waiter carrying a tray of glasses appeared at Draco’s elbow, and he handed one first to Granger, before taking two more, handing one to Potter and keeping the other for himself. The waiter disappeared as silently as he’d appeared.

Granger had stepped away from him, but since Draco had arranged her between Potter and himself, there was nowhere for her to really go. She glanced between them for a moment before using one hand to grip her glass and crossing the other over her chest.

Potter glanced at her and then over at Draco, wearing the same look of consternation Granger had worn earlier.

“Hermione? Are you alright?”

Granger had finished half her glass already and she took another sip before replying. “I’m fine.”

Potter looked at Draco suspiciously. “What did you do to her?”

Draco raised an eyebrow. “I didn’t do anything. We were just talking.”


Draco noted with amusement that the glass was nearly empty.

“What were you talking about?” Potter asked, suspicion still coloring his tone.

“About you, actually,” Draco replied innocently.

Granger looked at him, clearly horrified.

Potter frowned at him. “About me?”

Granger turned towards Potter, laughing, far too high-pitched to be natural. “Just about the case.”

“Really?” Potter asked, turning his frown on Granger.

“Well I suppose it depends on what case you’re talking about,” Draco said smoothly.

Granger whipped her head around to glare at him. Draco was very glad to see that her wand had yet to make an appearance.

“We were talking about your case,” Granger said firmly.

Draco tapped a finger against his lips. “I suppose that’s true.”

Granger evidently realized how that could be interpreted and blushed. “That’s not what I meant!”

Draco smirked.

Potter looked back and forth between them, clearly baffled. “You weren’t talking about Malfoy’s case?”
“Well as I said, Potter, it depends on what case you’re talking about. We were having a lovely conversation about –”

“About nothing!” Granger interrupted loudly. Several heads turned in her direction and she downed the last of her champagne.

Potter’s expression fell back into a frown. “What the bloody hell is going on?”

When Draco opened his mouth to respond, Granger grabbed his arm, digging her nails in. “Not here!” she hissed at him. Or rather, it would have been a hiss if she hadn’t been so panicked.

“You’re right,” Draco said, smirking. “We should take this conversation somewhere private.” He twisted his arm so that her arm became entwined with his, placing one hand proprietarily over hers, and then started walking towards the side of the ballroom. He looked back “Coming, Potter?”

Draco led them to a small parlor near the ballroom that technically hadn’t been opened to the public, but had a fire burning in the heart nonetheless, as well as a couple lamps lit. When Potter closed the door behind him, a locking charm and privacy wards popped into place. Draco settled next to Granger on the backless loveseat in front of the fire, and Potter took the armchair across from them.

“So what’s this all about? What were you two talking about?” Potter asked, running a hand through his hair, mussing the neat part he’d somehow coaxed into it.

Draco nearly licked his lips. Potter looked delectable sitting there, his profile edged in fiery gold and his robes outlining how very fit he was.

“I just asked Granger how long you two had been seeing each other,” Draco said, his gaze never leaving him. He felt Granger tense up, her shoulder brushing his arm.

Potter cleared his throat. “We aren’t seeing each other.”

Draco raised his eyebrows. “After that kiss you shared, you aren’t dating?”

Granger spluttered beside him.

“We kissed too and we aren’t dating, Malfoy!” Potter retorted hotly. He seemed to realize what he’d said a moment later and flushed bright red.

“What?” Granger squeaked. “Harry!”

Draco leaned back, grinning. He stretched out his wings, curling the very edge of the one closer to the fire around the edge of the couch, just barely enclosing Granger.

“It was just a kiss! I mean, uh, it was, uh…” Potter stuttered to a halt, running a hand through his hair again and shifting in his seat.

“What?” Granger repeated, her voice less squeaky but no less shocked. “You kissed Malfoy?”

Draco could hear the unspoken *and you didn’t tell me?*

“I, er, I meant to tell you,” Potter said, cheeks still bright red.

“You meant to? You *meant to?*”
“Well you didn’t tell me before you went to the Manor!” Harry defended.

“Because you’d just told me that you’d been attracted to me for years! How was I supposed to feel about that?”

“Well ideally you were supposed to feel the same!”

Draco watched them avidly, fascinated by the currents he could feel running between them. His Veela could feel the pheromones in the room, and he could practically smell the desire coming off both of them – mixed in with a fair amount of annoyance and confusion and anger.

“Then why didn’t you tell me sooner?” Granger demanded.

“Because you never showed any sign of being interested,” Potter said, scrubbing a hand through his hair again.

Granger huffed. “What was I supposed to do? Put up a sign?”

“So you do feel the same?” Potter’s face had taken on the look of a puppy promised a treat.

“I already told you!”

Both of them appeared to have forgotten Draco was in the room, but he wasn’t bothered at all. Merlin’s balls they are so fucking hot.

“You should have said something, then!”

“You wouldn’t even kiss me in the club until he said something!” Granger said, pointing forcefully at Draco.

Draco smirked, looking at Potter in challenge.

Potter looked at both of them and then straightened his shoulders, standing up. “Fine then.”

He quickly crossed the few feet between them, leaned down, cupping Granger’s head with both hands, and kissed her.

Fucking hell.

Granger moaned, and the sound went straight to Draco’s cock. From the way Potter shifted, it had the same effect on him. Draco watched them avidly as they snogged, the way Granger’s hands traced over Potter’s shoulders and arms, how Potter sucked on Granger’s lip before moving his attention to her throat, nipping and sucking and kissing. Granger leaned back and her shoulders brushed his wings.

Her eyes flew open, even as she kept her hands on Potter’s biceps. She looked at Draco, and her eyes were wide, her pupils nearly overtaking the irises. Her face was flushed and Draco didn’t think he’d ever seen anything hotter.

She gasped again as Potter did something against the curve of her shoulder, her eyes falling shut for a moment before she slowly opened them again, refocusing on him.

“Mal…Malfoy,” she breathed.

Every fiber of his body jerked to attention. Even Potter noticed, slowly pulling his mouth away, but leaving his hands on her shoulders.
“What’s happening?” Granger asked, voice raspy.

Draco smirked, leaning closer until he was speaking into the space above her ear, loud enough for Potter to hear. “Nothing you don’t want. Because you do want this, don’t you?”

He pulled back enough to see her eyes. They flicked back and forth between him and Harry, finally settling back on him. “Yes,” she breathed. Potter moaned lowly.

Draco grinned, leaning back in. “You want Potter. Want him to snog you, to touch you, to fuck you, to take you apart.” He flicked his tongue against the shell of her ear, causing her breath to hitch. “But you don’t just want Potter, do you?”

He didn’t pull away this time, leaving his lips brushing against the edge of her ear.

There was a long moment, before she took a deep breath that all of them could feel. “No,” she finally admitted, voice high.

From his position, Draco looked at Potter. “And you don’t just want Granger, do you Potter?”

Potter bit his lip. Draco had to resist the urge to lean over and bite Potter’s lip himself. “No. I want you too.” He blushed after saying it, but he didn’t move away.

Draco wanted to crow. He flexed the wing that wasn’t wrapped around Granger, bringing it around Potter. He smirked. “The feeling is mutual.”

Granger gasped softly. Draco looked down and saw her staring at his wings. They do look nice. The fire was illuminating the silver, making it look even more metallic and shining.

Draco watched her face and he saw when the realization hit. Her head whipped up so fast that Draco only just moved his head aside in time to avoid a bloody nose.

Her eyes were wide. “Oh Merlin, it’s us.”

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? Feelings? Let me know!

And a question for you all: would you prefer if the next chapter were from Hermione's perspective (going in order) or Harry's (keeping the numbers even)? I have ideas for both, but I'd love to know what you guys think.
Harry looked back and forth between Malfoy and Hermione, bewildered. Malfoy was smirking and Hermione looked shocked.

They’d been having what Harry personally thought was a really satisfying and long overdue snog and now Hermione seemed to have forgotten about him entirely. She was staring at Malfoy and practically panting when she remembered to breathe, drawing his eye to the low neck of her gown. He was pretty sure she never would have bought something like this normally.

“I’ll have to send Ginny flowers.”

“What’s us?” Harry asked when no one had said anything for nearly a minute.

“Uh…” Hermione stopped and bit her lip.

Becoming aware that it wasn’t really comfortable to be half-leaning forward, he leaned back a little, half his weight on the knee that had somehow ended up on the couch next to Hermione’s leg. He could feel the feathers of Malfoy’s wing brushing against the back of his robes.

He looked at Malfoy and raised an eyebrow in question.

“What do you know anything about Veela, Potter?” Malfoy asked, dodging the question.

Harry frowned. So this has something to do with Veela? He wished he’d paid more attention when Bill talked about Fleur, but their wedded bliss could get overwhelming and he usually found a reason to be somewhere else when Bill started waxing poetic about Fleur’s many charms. There was a reason he’d brought in Hermione for Malfoy’s case.

“Er, not much, actually.”
Malfy didn’t look surprised and the smirk hadn’t left his face. “We’re quite special, as you can see.” He flexed his wings, ruffling his feathers and making them flash in the firelight.

“Yes, so?”

“So, one of the things that makes Veela so special is having a mate.”

“What does that have to with me and Hermione?” he asked, annoyed. The heat inside the cocoon of Malfy’s wings was a bit intense, and a bead of sweat was starting to gather at his temple. He was pretty sure that wasn’t why he snapped a bit, though.

“We’re his mates,” Hermione blurted.

Harry stared at her. “We are?”

She bit her lip again. “Yes.”

He shook his head. “That doesn’t make sense.”

Malfy scoffed. “Of course it does.”

Harry glared at him. “I didn’t ask you.”

“You didn’t ask anyone,” Malfy pointed out, and even though the smirk was gone, the infuriatingly helpful expression that replaced it wasn’t better.

Harry sneered, but Hermione interrupted before he could respond.

“He’s right, Harry. It does make sense – all Veelas have a mate, or two, in Malfy’s case.”

*Of course Malfy’s fucking special.* “And why does this make sense? I don’t see why it has to be us.”

“It’s not a choice, Potter,” Malfy drawled.

“More’s the pity,” Harry snapped.

Malfy had the nerve to be unaffected. *And bugger it all, why does he have to look so fucking perfect?* He could have stepped off the pages of a muggle fashion magazine, or out of the pages of *Witch Weekly*, which had done a story on him last month. Not that he’d read it.

“Harry,” Hermione said, reproachful. “Malfy’s right.”

Hearing that for the second time didn’t make it sound any stranger.

“So we’re just supposed to accept that we’re his mates?” *Great. Just fucking great.*

“Well, no,” Hermione admitted. “We do have the right to refuse.”

“And if we do? What happens to him?” Harry purposely didn’t look at Malfy while he waited for Hermione’s reply.

Hermione hesitated before replying. “He won’t die, but he would get progressively more uncomfortable until eventually the mating pains started to fade, but every time he saw one of us, or thought of us, or heard about us, they’d come back.”
“And since we’re in the news all the time…” Harry murmured.

“Right. And if they progressed too far, they could drive him mad.”

“A pleasant prospect,” Malfoy muttered.

“So we don’t really have a choice.” Harry rubbed a hand through his hair, ruining what was left of the neat arrangement he’d managed to get it into.

“We do, Harry,” Hermione said, taking his hand.

Harry sighed and looked at Malfoy out of the corner of his eye. He’d lost the easy confidence he’d exuded from the first time Harry had seen him that evening and was now eyeing him warily.

“Convenient that you didn’t mention any of this earlier,” Harry said mutinously.

Malfoy sneered. “And what would have done if I had? Run into my arms?”

Possibly.

“No. But you tricked us!”

“How did I manage that?” Malfoy asked, smirking again.

“You…you tried to seduce us! First at that club and then again tonight!” Harry said indignantly.

Malfoy leaned forward, all trace of amusement gone, replaced by heat and just enough darkness to have Harry shivering in something that definitely wasn’t fear. “And did I succeed?”

“Uh…” Harry leaned back, but found himself enclosed by Malfoy’s wing. He knew very well that if he really wanted to, he could pull out his wand and leave, but he was equally sure he didn’t want to.

“Did I entice you? Did I seduce you?” Malfoy leaned further forward, and Harry could feel his warm breath puffing against his lips. “Did you think of me?” His voice lowered. “Did you think of her? Did you think of us?”

Then Malfoy’s lips were on his, all anger and lust. He felt Malfoy’s teeth against his lips and then his tongue was there and Harry let him in and he felt his eyes roll back even as his eyelids fell shut. Malfoy tasted like champagne and chocolate. One of Malfoy’s hands was on his shoulder and the other had found its way to his hip underneath his dress robes, the heat burning through his shirt. Harry wasn’t sure how, but one of his own hands had ended up cupping the back of Malfoy’s neck, his fingers twisting in the strands there, and the other was clutching Malfoy’s upper arm.

He could still feel Hermione’s thigh pressed against his lower leg, but he was surprised when he felt her hand settle on his thigh. He was more surprised when he felt her lips against the side of his neck. He moaned at the feeling, and he would have felt embarrassed if Malfoy hadn’t moaned a second later when he somehow managed to get his hand under Harry’s shirt.

Harry tugged harder on Malfoy’s hair, angling his head so that he had a better angle to snog Malfoy and Hermione had a better angle for the maddening nibbling she was doing on his neck. He managed to get the hand he’d had on Malfoy’s arm around Hermione, slipping his fingers underneath the low back of the dress that had been teasing him all night. When she’d danced with Malfoy earlier, he’d wanted nothing more than to pull her into a dark alcove and have his way with her. Well, both of them, if he were honest with himself.

Considering he was currently locked in a three-way snog, it seemed a little silly to deny that he desperately wanted both of them. No matter how infuriating a git Malfoy is. An infuriating git with
Harry groaned when Malfoy’s hand slid down over his groin, brushing against his erection. He’d been half hard since he saw Malfoy whispering into Hermione’s ear on the dance floor, and having both of them under his hands had only made the problem worse. Malfoy stroked it, and he bit Malfoy’s lip in retaliation, drawing a groan from him. 

Beside him, Hermione moaned softly, and Harry managed to open his eyes enough to see that Malfoy had his other hand on Hermione’s breast and was flicking his thumb over her nipple, which was poking out against the silky fabric. He couldn’t help but slip his hand further down her back, his fingers grazing against the top curve of her arse underneath her dress. When she moaned again, he felt himself somehow get harder. 

Harry went back to kissing Malfoy with renewed vigor, taking out his annoyance at being left in the dark, at being left alone in the club, at being teased relentlessly for weeks now, on him. He thrust his tongue into Malfoy’s mouth, garnering another groan. He noticed, somewhere in the back of his mind, that Malfoy’s wings had closed in around them, blanketing them in heat and energy and desire. 

Harry wasn’t sure how long they’d been there when there was a thump against the door, and then someone jiggling the doorknob, and then the muffled sound of giggles fading away. He pulled away, breathing harshly.

“We should stop,” he managed to say.

“Fucking hell, Potter,” Malfoy said, voice raspy.

“We’re…we’re practically in public, Malfoy,” Harry said, shaking his head slightly to clear it.

“I don’t care,” Malfoy snarled, grabbing the back of Harry’s head and smashing their mouths together again. Harry lost himself for a moment before jerking back.

He panted heavily. “Public, Malfoy. There are people everywhere!”

“Locking spells, Potter.” He ran a hand over Harry’s erection again and Harry felt his eyes flutter shut for a moment before he forced them open again, pushing Malfoy’s hand away.

“This is your party, Malfoy. People will miss you,” Harry argued.

“I guarantee no one cares,” Malfoy replied. “They’re probably all doing the same thing we are. Or were,” he tacked on, clearly resentful.

Hermione seemed to come back to herself. “Maybe Harry’s right. And besides, we shouldn’t go further until we’ve talked more about what this means,” she said, motioning to the three of them.

That wasn’t quite what Harry had been thinking about, but he supposed that was true as well.

Malfoy smirked. “This is what it means.” He leaned in and kissed Hermione, snogging her thoroughly, both hands on her breasts. Harry watched, mesmerized, as Hermione slowly fell apart underneath Malfoy’s hands. Malfoy turned his attention to her neck, nipping down the length of her throat before sucking a bright red mark on the curve of her shoulder. Harry adjusted himself half-consciously.

Malfoy looked at him out of the corner of his eye. “Still want to stop?” he murmured, pinching one of Hermione’s nipples until she moaned.
Harry swallowed. “We should,” he said, voice husky. That sounded convincing. He cleared his throat. “Yes, we should stop.”

Malfoy glared but pulled back, although he left his wings surrounding them.

“Well, Potter?”

“Er…”

Hermione sat up straight, adjusting the neck of her dress. Harry made a concerted effort not to stare.

“We should talk,” Hermione said firmly.

Malfoy’s wings rustled. “About what? I think it’s fairly straightforward.”

“For you, perhaps,” Hermione reproached.

Harry had the distinct feeling he was the only one who didn’t know what was going on. He felt like he was back at Hogwarts.

“Someone explain,” he demanded.

“I already did, Potter. We’re mates. It’s not complicated.” Malfoy finally pulled back his wings, tucking them behind his back.

Harry returned to his seat across from them. “But you didn’t explain what happens now.”

“We have to decide whether or not we accept him,” Hermione said softly.

“Right now?” Harry asked, panicked. He was not ready to make that choice.

“No, but probably soon,” Hermione replied.

“That would be preferable,” Malfoy drawled.

“What would happen if we did accept him? Accept this?” He gestured between them, glancing at Malfoy, who was sitting with his arms crossed.

“We’d probably move in together, and then we’d go through a bonding ceremony.”

Harry frowned. Bonding ceremonies were sometimes part of cases at the DMLE, and rarely in a good way. “What kind of bonding ceremony?”

“It would be a lot like a traditional wizarding wedding,” Hermione replied.

“So, we’d be married?”

“Essentially.” Hermione leaned forward. “It’s not dangerous. Bill and Fleur went through the same ceremony.”

“Then how is it different from a traditional wizarding wedding?” It sounded like there was another shoe waiting to drop.

“It’s for life.”
Harry ran a hand through his hair. “What if we go through with all this and we hate each other in five years? We live in the same house and don’t speak to each other?”

“You think you’d hate us?” Hermione asked, clearly hurt.

Harry sighed. “No.” But life sentences aren’t exactly comforting.

Hermione seemed to realize what he was thinking. “We don’t have to do everything all at once. We’re not in a rush.”

Malfoy scoffed quietly, his first contribution to the conversation. Hermione glared at him.

“We’re not,” she insisted. “Are we?”

Malfoy sneered, but then he sighed petulantly. “No.”

“You see?” she said brightly, turning back to face him. “We can just treat this like a normal, uh, relationship.” She blushed.

Relationship? Oh bloody hell. It made sense of course, but he hadn’t thought about this as being a relationship. As something involving feelings. He’d only just worked up the nerve to tell Hermione how he felt, and he’d had plenty of time to work out his feelings for her. With Malfoy…

“Can three people even have a relationship?”

“Absolutely,” Hermione replied immediately. “You, Ron, and I were all friends weren’t we? It’s just like that. But with, uh, with love.” Her voice grew squeaky on the last word.

Love? Harry looked over at Malfoy, who was now glaring at the fire. How on earth could this possibly work?

Harry rubbed a hand a hand through his hair. “Do you want this, Malfoy? Er, want us, I mean? In a relationship, that is. Not, uh, in, in that way.” Harry flushed, but he hoped it just looked like heat from the fire. It was pretty clear that Malfoy wanted them in that way.

Malfoy sighed deeply, unfolding his arms. “Yes, probably.”

“What does that mean?” Harry asked.

“It means I don’t know, Potter. I don’t have all the answers. My Veela is perfectly happy to bond with you right now, to lock you in my bedroom and keep you there forever. But the rest of me knows that we’ve barely spoken a dozen words in the last six years. And the words before that…” Malfoy paused and rubbed the bridge of his nose. “Well. We don’t exactly have the best foundation for amicable coworkers, let alone a happy marriage, do we?”

It was weirdly comforting that Malfoy sounded just as confused as he was.

“So then what are we supposed to do?”

“We could try dating,” Hermione suggested.

Malfoy snorted. “Dating.”

Hermione frowned at him. “What’s wrong with dating?”
“I wouldn’t…” Malfoy sighed again. “Dating is a bit of a muggle thing. And besides, Veela don’t date, they court. Manners and tradition dictate that I, as the Veela, should court my mates. Dating is much too casual.”

“You want to court us?” Harry asked skeptically.

Malfoy shrugged, shoulders stiff.

“Er, I suppose that’s alright.”

Malfoy looked at him sharply.

“I mean, I don’t really know what that means, but it’s worth a try, I suppose.” What the hell.

“It’s traditional, like muggle practices in the past. Very formal,” Hermione added.

“It’s less formal now,” Malfoy corrected. “Purebloods aren’t exactly up-to-date, but the traditions are less strict than they were four hundred years ago,” he added wryly.

“So, that’s settled, then?” Harry asked after an awkward pause.

Hermione nodded. “I think it’s a good place to start.”

*****

They’d returned to ballroom after reaching their agreement, Malfoy grumbling under his breath during the trip, but more time had passed than Harry had thought, and most people had either gone home or disappeared somewhere. Only a few people were still dancing, with a few more were scattered around the edges, drinking and nibbling on the remnants of the nearly-empty buffet table.

Catching sight of a distinctive set of robes, Harry jerked. Fuck. He’d completely forgotten that he was in charge of security for tonight. Muttering an apology, he rushed out onto the balcony, catching up to the patrolling Auror.

“Bennett, report?” he requested, just barely out of breath.

Bennett’s face was blank, not indicating one way or the other what he thought of Harry’s sudden appearance, and what Harry could feel were his slightly swollen lips.

“All clear, sir. No unusual disturbances.”

Harry raised an eyebrow. “Unusual?”

“There were, of course, the usual disturbances to be expected on Samhain.” His poker face slipped a bit with the twitch of his lip into a hint of a smile.

“Ah, of course.” Harry now knew quite intimately what those disturbances entailed. “Thank you, Bennett.”

Bennett nodded his head and returned to his patrol, looking out over the dark gardens.

Harry went back inside, seeing Malfoy talking quietly to Hermione against one wall. Harry rejoined them.

Hermione smiled at him. “I was just telling Malfoy that it might be time for me to go home.”
Harry glanced at his watch, noting that it was nearly two in the morning. “That’s probably smart. Are you going in to work tomorrow?”

Hermione nodded. “Yes, I have too much to do now that I’ve officially resigned to miss a day.”

“Makes sense. I’ll see you there, then. Lunch?”

Hermione smiled. “Yes, sounds good. Good night, Harry.” She turned to Malfoy. “Would you mind showing me where the Floo is? I’m a bit too tired to Apparate.”

Malfoy held out his arm to her. “Follow me.”

Harry watched them leave, wishing he could follow but knowing he had to deal with the Aurors. He groaned.

*****

There wasn’t enough Pepper-Up in the world to make him feel at all ready for work the next morning. Harry dragged himself out of bed at eight and barely made it in on time.

He went through two cups of coffee while he worked through the reports from the night before. All the Aurors who’d worked last night had the day off today, but he didn’t get that luxury since he had to report to Robards. Besides that, Dunham’s trial was scheduled to start that afternoon with an initial hearing of the Wizengamot. They’d just be going through statements, and fortunately, the only people who had to be there were the lawyers. Before the war, the case would have simply gone before the Wizengamot and been decided, but Robards, with the help of the few Muggle-borns and half-bloods in the Ministry, had pushed through reforms to the DMLE to modernize it and make the justice system more fair. Hermione had been very involved.

Harry prepared the last of the statements for the case, double-checking them, and then sent them over to the legal office of the DMLE with the paper-plane charm.

At eleven o’clock, he went into Robards’ office to deliver his report on the Samhain ball.

Robards let him in after he knocked, waving a hand to indicate he could sit.

“Potter.” He nodded his head in greeting. “How was last night?”

Harry handed over the collection or reports. “Good, sir. There were no disturbances. Everything went smoothly.”

Robards quickly skimmed the write-up Harry had put on the top of the pile. “Very good. Any trouble with the Malfoys?”

Harry fought down a flush. *Not that kind of trouble.* “No, sir. They were very hospitable.”

“Hm.” He flipped through the reports before setting them aside. “And the Dunham case?”

“The first hearing is this afternoon at two o’clock. I’ve already sent over the statements.”

Robards tapped his fingers against his desk. “Did Dunham hire a lawyer?”

Harry shook his head. “Said he didn’t need one because he wasn’t guilty.” Harry resisted the urge to grimace.

Robards shook his head. “The mad ones are almost worse. Well, keep me updated.”
Harry nodded and left.

When he showed up at Hermione’s office at half-past twelve and knocked, he wasn’t at all surprised to see her buried in work. He knocked on her door again to get her attention. Her head jerked up and then she blushed.

“I promised myself I wasn’t going to forget.” She looked down at her papers and sighed as she stood up. “I swear it multiplies when I’m not looking.”

Harry laughed. “I feel the same. Still, paperwork’s worse on an empty stomach. Come on.”

He grabbed her coat off the hook by the door and then held it out for her to slip into.

As they walked to their usual café, Harry wondered whether he should take her hand. Their fingers brushed as they walked, but he wasn’t sure if they’d reached that point. Her words from last night looped through his head, but it was one thing for her to say she felt the same in a haze of champagne, and another for them to hold hands in the Ministry.

Best not. He satisfied himself with pulling out her chair at the table after they’d picked up their sandwiches from the counter. That’s a bit boyfriend-y, isn’t it? She smiled at him as he sat across from her, so he figured he’d done something right.

All through lunch, they avoided the topic of the night before, limiting themselves to discussing work.

“I’m glad I’m resigning,” she said as they were finishing up.

Harry tilted his head. “Yeah?”

She nodded. “I feel a lot, well, freer, I suppose. I didn’t realize how stressful work had become until it wasn’t stretching ahead of me forever anymore.”

“Have you thought of what you’d want to do instead?”

She frowned. “Not really. I might take some time off. Not too much, but some time for myself might be nice.”

Harry couldn’t keep the thought of how, or if, he’d fit into that plan, from flitting through his mind. And what about this thing with Malfoy? “Well it’s not like you ever take time off,” Harry said instead.

“I –” she paused. “Well, I suppose you’re right.”

Harry laughed. “That doesn’t happen often.”

Hermione grinned. “Don’t sell yourself short, I’m sure it happens at least once a week.”

“I hope so, otherwise Robards is going to fire me any day now.”

Back in his office, Harry felt lighter than he had in a while. Even the mountains of paperwork he had to wade through weren’t enough to bring down his mood.

When an owl landed on his desk a little after three, he assumed it had to do with the Dunham case,
and so he was surprised to realize it had a package in addition to a letter. He untied both and then
gave the owl a couple treats from the dish on his desk before it flew away.

He opened the letter first, curious.

_Potter,_

_I quite enjoyed our night last night, despite your insistence on postponing our activities. I’m sure you
won’t be surprised if I tell you I hope it will happen again soon. You are both surprisingly…
enjoyable company._

_I realize you probably aren’t very aware of Veela courting customs. It consists partly of meetings,
which are a bit like muggle dates, or so I’ve heard, and partly of gifts. You needn’t fear – as the
courter, I am the one who is responsible for arranging meetings and sending gifts._

_I admit that I am not familiar with your preferences, so this first gift may not be to your taste. If it is
not, I would ask that you tell me so that I may avoid such a faux pas in the future._

-Malfoy

_P.S. I would ask one gift of you – please call me Draco._

Harry read through the letter twice, lingering on the postscript. Somehow, he couldn’t imagine
calling him Draco, even though it was, actually, his name. _And I suppose I ought to be on a first-
name basis with someone courting me._

He shook his head and then picked up the gift. He unwrapped it quickly, revealing a small box that
fit in the palm of his hand. He opened it to find a small phial nestled in a bed of black velvet. When
he picked it up, he could see a thin, silvery, wavering thread inside. He gaped. Malfoy – Draco – had
sent him a _memory_. Of all possible gifts, that hadn’t even been on the list.

Harry stared at the phial for a minute before finally going over the wall and tapping the hidden knob
with his wand to open the cabinet that contained his personal Pensieve. Tucking his wand back into
his sleeve, he opened the phial and then gently tipped the memory into the swirling grey liquid.

Taking a deep breath, he dipped his head into the basin.

Harry was surprised when he found himself in Hogwarts. For some reason, he’d expected a more
recent memory. He turned around and finally spotted Malfoy – _Draco_ – standing, peeking around a
corner to look into the hallway Harry was standing in. He turned to face the direction _Draco_ was
looking in and was only a little surprised to see himself, standing with Hermione, leaning against the
bank of windows lining one side of the hallway. It was during eighth year – Harry could see the line
on Hermione’s neck from Bellatrix’s knife. They were talking, although their words were muffled;
Draco must not have been quite in hearing distance.

He turned back to face Draco and watched his face. Draco looked…wistful.

The memory dissolved, and then reformed into the Transfiguration classroom, again during eighth
year. He was standing in the back of the classroom next to Draco’s desk. Draco was scratching
something on his parchment while looking forward and across the room to where Harry and
Hermione were sitting next to each other. Harry looked down at Draco’s parchment and saw a little
sketch of the two of them.
The memory dissolved again and this time he was in the Quidditch stands. He remembered this game – the last match of the year against Ravenclaw for the Cup. He was in the Slytherin stands and Draco was next to him, looking up. Harry saw himself, he was just starting the dive that would take him to catch the Snitch. Harry looked at Draco and was shocked to see that pinned to the inside of Malfoy’s robes, open over his uniform, was a small red-and-gold lion’s head pin. Draco didn’t cheer when Harry caught the snitch, but Harry saw the brief smile that flitted over his face before it was replaced by his usual sneer.

The memory dissolved again, and apparently it was the last one, because Harry was returned to his office.

Carefully, he retrieved the memory, returning it to the phial. He put the phial back in its box and then tucked the box inside one of the cubbies within the cabinet before returning the Pensieve to its hiding place.

Harry went back down at his desk and then sat there for a moment before he picked up his quill and dug out a piece of parchment. He had a letter to write.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? Feelings? Let me know!
Draco wasn’t nervous. The reason his hands were shaking as he finished tying the ribbon on the small box containing the memory he was sending to Potter wasn’t nerves. The manor was just a bit chilly. And it definitely wasn’t because his Veela was practically vibrating with energy about the fact that he was finally able to properly court his mates. Definitely not.

Draco could have wrapped the gift with magic, and even though Potter wouldn’t know the difference, he still liked the idea of wrapping it himself, the idea that everything about this gift was personal.

He summoned his owl and then attached the package and letter to its leg before sending it off to the Ministry. He watched it fly away until it was out of sight before turning away. The gift for Potter hadn’t been hard to think of. From reading all the interviews he’d ever given, and knowing what he did of him from school, and especially from their conversation the night before, he knew that Potter valued love. And even though Draco wasn’t nearly ready to declare anything, he could at least show Potter that it wasn’t all physical. He nearly laughed aloud remembering the look on Potter’s face when he’d asked about that last night. Potter couldn’t have looked more embarrassed if they’d been having that conversation while standing in the atrium of the Ministry.

With a sigh, Draco left his office. The gift for Granger was harder. As he walked through the Manor, dodging the house elves as they cleaned up the remnants from last night, he considered the gift he’d decided to give her. He entered the library and walked went to the large bookshelf in the back of the room that he’d shown Hermione when she’d visited. The table tucked into the alcove nearby held the book he was looking for.

He ran a finger gently over the cover. Too predictable? He worried that sending a book implied that he believed she was still the same swot from school. Well, she did seem impressed by the shelf.
Gently, he picked up the book. Unwilling to trust the fragile manuscript to muggle protections, even if it had been heavily protected by preservation charms, he gently cast a heavy-duty Bubble-Wrap charm. A soft white glow enfolded the book, and then he wrapped it equally gently in plain silver paper. Summoning a quill and parchment, he wrote out a note. He opened a window in the alcove, and his owl, which had returned, landed on the sill, looking at him disapprovingly. He cast a Lightweight charm on the book before he attached it and the letter he’d written and then sent the owl on its way again.

Draco was sitting in his office when a tapping at his window signaled the arrival of an owl. He didn’t recognize it, but he waved his wand to let it in, and he told himself he wasn’t upset that it wasn’t Potter’s owl. The owl glided in and landed on his desk, chirping until Draco gave it some owl treats from the bag he kept in his desk. While the owl munched happily, Draco untied and read the letter.

Draco,

Sorry we didn’t get a chance to talk last night. I was…busy. And it seems you were as well, because from what I heard you disappeared very early on. Imagine my surprise to hear that Draco Malfoy was such a bad host! Not that anyone noticed, of course. Most of the guests were distracted by Petunia Parkinson making such a fool of herself that Pansy had to get the help of an Auror to escort her home.

Anyway, my girlfriend, who was so distracting last night, and whom you had the pleasure of (re-) meeting a few weeks ago, has asked that I invite you on a double date. She says it will be ‘very amusing.’ I told her you weren’t seeing anyone but she insisted. She assured me that she was certain you wouldn’t have trouble finding someone to accompany you.

I swear I didn’t tell her about you and Granger and Potter. You didn’t make progress and not tell me, did you? To have my girlfriend know first would truly would me. Deeply. Regardless, I’ve made reservations at the Griffon for seven o’clock on Friday, so you had better make some progress before then.

-Blaise

Draco frowned. Blaise’s girlfriend? That Weasley girl! He thought back to her strange behavior last night. His eyes widened as he reread the letter. How did she know? Neither Potter nor Granger could have said something, because they’d only put it together last night and he’d been with them every moment until they both went home. But the Weaselette apparently knew enough, and somehow she’d arranged it so that he had to take at least one of his mates out in public. He could technically refuse, but Blaise would kill him if he displeased his girlfriend, or if he had to cancel a reservation at the Griffon. Draco wasn’t sure whether he should feel annoyed or grateful.

He quickly wrote out a reply agreeing to the date and then sent it with the owl who had waited patiently for his reply. Before he had a chance to close the window, another owl flew through. He recognized this one from the many letters Potter had sent him about the case. He gave several treats the grey owl, who flew away as soon as he had untied the letter. He ignored the excited flutter of the Veela in the back of his mind.

Draco took a deep breath before unfolding it.
Draco,

*It feels strange to write Draco instead of Malfoy, but it makes sense if we’re trying to get to know each other. And you should call me Harry, then, I guess.*

*So, Draco, you were also...surprisingly enjoyable company. Even if you were an arse. Although, you do have a very nice arse, actually, so I suppose that makes up for it. I think it’s alright to say that I’m looking forward to seeing you again? Even though I think everything about this situation is strange and confusing.*

*Thank you for your gift. It was a bit unexpected, but not at all unwelcome. To my taste, I suppose you would say. I can’t imagine it was easy to send those memories, and I want to give you something real in return – my name is hardly a gift. So, if you tap this parchment with your wand, my Floo address will appear at the bottom and your magic will be keyed to the wards on it. I would ask that you burn the address after you read it, because I don’t give it out to just anyone. And don’t pop in just because you feel like it. One person who does that is enough.*

*Also, I wanted to let you know that Dunham’s trial started today. I’ll owl you when you need to come in to speak, but that probably won’t be for at least a week. The Wizengamot moves about as fast as a frozen snail, as I’m sure you know.*

-Harry

*P.S. Should I expect to hear from you about a ‘meeting’ or something soon? I’m relying on you to keep me from looking like a fool.*

*He trusts me. Even knowing that he was grinning like a fool wasn’t enough to keep Draco from rereading the letter twice, tracing over the curves of the letters and the splotches of ink. The postscript was a bit messier than the rest of the letter, and Draco couldn’t help but wonder if Potter had hesitated before adding it. That was more revealing than even giving his Floo address.*

*Draco pulled out his wand and gently tapped the parchment, and spiky black lines appeared below the postscript spelling out Prongs’ Den. He frowned. While it was common for wizards to choose unusual names for their homes so that their Floo addresses couldn’t easily be guessed, this name seemed particularly unusual. Regardless, the idea that he could now contact or visit Potter—Harry—whenever he liked, even if he did have to send warning in advance was extremely pleasing, particularly to his Veela.*

*His feathers ruffled gently as his wings flared out, casting rippling shadows on the floor of his office. Looking over the postscript again, Draco smirked and penned a short response to Harry’s letter. Summoning a different owl from the owlery, Draco sent off the letter.*

*The next morning, a letter each from Granger and Harry, as well as his usual business correspondence, was waiting for Draco when he went down to breakfast. Ignoring the business letters, Draco picked up the silver letter opener a house elf had left him and opened the letter from Harry.*

*He grinned as he read the short missive.*
Draco,

I’ll go, and you had better not say anything about my hair or clothes.

-Harry

Draco laid aside that letter and picked up Granger’s.

Malf–

Malfoy,

I can’t believe you sent me this. I have no idea where you got it and I’m sure it’s worth a fortune. I know courting gifts are traditional, but this is too much. I was expecting flowers, or chocolate even, not a priceless manuscript!

It’s utterly ridiculous but I love it and even though I’m sure it belongs in a museum or a research library, I’m keeping it. Don’t get a big head about it. And don’t get any ideas!

-Hermione Granger

His grin grew wider as he read until his face felt as though it would split in two. Once a bibliophile, always a bibliophile.

Setting both letters carefully aside, he finished breakfast in a ridiculously cheerful mood.

At quarter to seven on Friday evening, Draco used his newly-gained knowledge and took the Floo to Harry’s house. When he stepped out of the hearth, focused on spelling away the soot on his clothes, he nearly tripped over the table in the middle of the room. His shin banged against the wood and he grimaced.

“Er, sorry about that,” Harry said, hurrying forward and helping Draco straighten up. “I keep meaning to rearrange the furniture so it’s not so close to the Floo but so few people use the Floo that I always forget.”

Most of Harry’s rambling went over his head as Draco took in the feeling of Harry’s arm around his waist and the smell of his cologne.

“That’s practically a hazard,” Draco drawled when he’d got his voice back. “Almost as much of a hazard as that chair.” He tilted his head toward the horribly old and tattered armchair to the right of the fireplace.

Harry frowned. “What’s wrong with that chair?”

Draco raised an eyebrow. “It’s ugly.”

“So? It’s comfortable.”
“Things can be both comfortable and aesthetically pleasing, Harry.” Draco savored the taste of Harry’s name as it rolled off his tongue for the first time without being accompanied by his last name or vitriol.

Harry appeared equally entranced. “I, er, I suppose so…Draco.”

Draco nearly shuddered at the feeling of hearing his given name on his mate’s lips.

Harry stepped away and then stood there, looking awkward and uncomfortable and utterly delicious. Draco looked him up and down, savoring the view of Harry in a black muggle suit that stretched across his shoulders and around his things underneath a black outer robe that emphasized the broadness of his shoulders.

Harry frowned when Draco simply stared. “Is it alright? I asked Ginny for advice but she said it was about time I learned to dress myself and sent me the address of a tailor.” He tugged at the lapel of his jacket. “It seems a bit tight, but the tailor assured me it was perfectly in fashion. And I didn’t want to embarrass you. Ginny told me the Griffon is the most exclusive restaurant in Wizarding London.”

Harry was blushing now and Draco knew he should say something before Harry started babbling again. “It isn’t too tight. At all. You look absolutely perfect.” Draco stepped into Harry’s personal space and brushed his hands down the lapels Harry had played with, smoothing the wrinkles. 


Draco smirked. “My tailor would never let me out looking anything but perfect, Harry.” Just as good the second time. He licked his lips. “Ready?” he asked, holding out his arm.

Harry nodded, grasping his arm firmly. “Ready.”

They Disapparated with a crack.

Blaise and Weasley hadn’t yet arrived when they appeared at the restaurant, but the maître d’ quickly led them to a private table in the back, the half-circle booth encouraging them to sit close together. Seeing that Harry was nervous, Draco sat at a polite distance away so that only their knees were touching underneath the table. For now.

After sitting in uncomfortable silence for a few minutes, Blaise and Weasley finally slid into the other side of the booth, looking rather more recently shagged than was strictly appropriate.

The Weaselette leaned over the table to air-kiss Harry’s cheek. “So sorry we’re late, got caught up.”

The Veela twitched underneath Draco’s skin at the casual intimacy. Draco resisted the urge to release his talons and merely raised an eyebrow at Blaise, who shrugged unrepentantly and smirked.

“Wine?” Draco suggested. On cue, a waiter appeared and Draco ordered what he knew was one of the most expensive bottles of red wine in their cellar. Harry appeared clueless, but Blaise and Weasley both grinned at him.

The waiter appeared again carrying a bottle of wine a moment later, opening the bottle and pouring a small amount into a glass for Draco to taste. After taking a sip, rolling it around in his mouth to appreciate the flavor, he nodded to the waiter who immediately poured everyone a precise glass before disappearing again.
After studying their menus and then placing their orders with the ever-prompt waiter, Draco turned to Blaise. If Harry was determined to sit in silence, then Draco would counter with excruciating politesse. “How is your mother?” he asked Blaise.

“Quite well,” he replied with subtle amusement. “She and her new husband have finally returned from their honeymoon and gone to the villa in Tuscany.”

“That must be very nice this time of year,” Draco said.

“I doubt my mother takes much notice of the weather,” Blaise commented drily. The hint of glare he sent Draco assured him that the subject was now closed.

“And your mother, Miss Weasley?” Draco asked, more out of a sense of courtesy than any real interest. But it was clear that she and Harry were close, and friends of his mate were, at the very least, allies of his.

Weasley rolled her eyes. “Call me Ginny, or Ginevra if you’re too stuffy for that. And my mother is fine, but a far less interesting topic than the two of you. So.” She rested her elbows on the table and smiled a frankly terrifying smile. “Tell me all about it.”

“Ginny,” Harry hissed.

This only made Ginevra smile wider. “That means there’s something to tell.” She took a sip of her wine. “No point hiding from me, Harry.”

“Ginny! We’re in public.”

Ginevra shrugged, taking another sip of wine. “I didn’t ask for the gory details, but thank you for confirming there are some.” She grinned.

Draco looked back and forth between them. Harry rubbed his face and groaned. Draco leaned close. “You don’t have to say anything,” he murmured.

Harry looked at him out of the corner of his eye. “Evasion only encourages her.”

From the way she was leaning back, with Blaise’s arm slung around her shoulders, looking like the cat who’d got the cream, he thought Harry was probably right.

“Ginny, later, okay?” Harry asked, pleading.

Ginevra sighed loudly. “Fine,” she said, with the air of one being extremely magnanimous. “But now you can’t leave anything out. Not one single thing, Harry James Potter.”

Draco gave Blaise a look just this side of beseeching. Blaise smirked but took pity on him. “Love, didn’t you tell me that training was starting again?”

“So soon?” Harry asked.

Ginevra leaned forward, abandoning her pose of satisfaction. “Yeah, our coach wants to get first in the League next year, so he’s starting training a month earlier. A whole month! We’ve barely had a month off. And he wants us to keep training in Wales – in January! It’s mad.”

Draco nearly grimaced. Scotland in the winter had been bad, especially living in the dungeons. Flying outdoors in the winter in Wales was not a pleasant prospect to consider. Beside him, Harry shivered as if having the same thought. If Draco hadn’t hidden his wings for the evening, he would
The conversation about Quidditch continued through the appetizers and the main course, but Ginevra’s patience had apparently run out by dessert.

“So, are you two actually seeing each other? Or did Malfoy here decide that only the Chosen One was good enough to bring to dinner at the Griffon?” She attempted an innocent look, but it was ruined by the gleam in her eye and the pornographic way she licked chocolate mousse off the delicate dessert spoon. Blaise was utterly distracted by her oral abilities and provided no buffer at all.

Draco felt Harry stiffen at Ginevra’s question. Draco had steadily worked his way closer to Harry throughout the meal until their thighs were touching from hip to knee, but above the table they simply looked as though they were sitting near each other, not that anyone would have been fooled if they’d been paying attention.

Glad of the excuse, Draco put a hand on Harry’s thigh to lend support. And to feel the muscle that tensed and then relaxed beneath his touch.

He thought about answering, but he wanted to hear Harry’s response. *Will he claim me, this, in public?* Although the Griffon provided plenty of privacy and there were no tables near enough to hear their conversation.

Harry appeared frozen, his fork, loaded with a bite of chocolate cake, hovering halfway to his mouth. Finally he appeared to unfreeze and slowly set his fork down. He ran his now-free hand through his hair, mussing the part.

“We, uh, we’re sort of, well, uh, yeah. I guess. We’re seeing each other.”

“That sounded like a question,” Ginevra said, clearly enjoying Harry’s nervousness.

Draco was too distracted by the fizzing sensation running along his nerve endings to prevent her interrogation.

Harry had affirmed their relationship. *In public.* Even if the Weasley was a close friend, Blaise wasn’t, and he’d still acknowledged it. And they were in a restaurant, far more public a place than the private room in the Manor. Draco felt like he was floating, maybe even flying.

Harry cleared his throat. “No, we are. Definitely. Draco called it courting, I think.”

Ginevra’s eyebrows shot up. “Courting? You’re letting him court you?”

Even Blaise looked at him with surprise, and all Draco could do was smirk slightly in agreement.

“Well, it seemed important to him,” Harry said defensively.

Even if Harry didn’t realize everything he’d just admitted to, Blaise and even Ginevra seemed to. Ginevra sat back, folding her arms and looking contemplative.

Harry turned to look at him helplessly.

Reading his face, Draco turned back to their dining partners. “If you’ll excuse us, I think we’re going to retire.” *Let them make of that what they will.*

When Draco started to raise his hand to signal the waiter, Blaise waved him off. “I’ve got this. Off you go.”
Draco gave him a genuine smile of thanks before smoothing his features. He slid out of the booth and then offered his arm to Harry, who appeared to be too bewildered to put up an argument.

Draco escorted him smoothly out of the restaurant and then Apparated them back to Harry’s flat.

The feel of Apparation seemed to pull Harry out of his daze. “Thank you.”

Draco wasn’t sure what he was thanking him for, but replied, “You’re welcome.”

“Do you, do you mind that I told her? I assumed it wasn’t a secret, since you invited me out, and all. But won’t it be strange? When people find out it’s the three of us? Because it’ll get out eventually. And then people will start saying that I’m cheating on you, or Hermione’s playing both of us, or something equally ridiculous. Rita Skeeter will have the biggest field day in years.” Harry ran a hand through his hair and then slumped down on the couch.

Draco sat beside him, letting out his wings and wrapping one around Harry’s shoulder. He spared a brief thought of satisfaction for the excellence of his tailor. “I don’t mind at all. I’m rather pleased, actually.”

Harry glanced at him in surprise. “Really?”

Draco smirked. “Of course. My mate affirmed our relationship in public. I couldn’t be anything but pleased.”

“So it’s just the Veela, then?”

Draco frowned. “What?”

“It’s just the Veela that wants to be public, that’s pleased about it,” Harry clarified.

Draco gave a long-suffering sigh. “Harry, I am the Veela. The Veela is me. We aren’t separate entities. Yes, sometimes it feels like a separate set of instincts, but it’s still a part of me. I can’t separate it from the rest of who I am, even if I wanted to.”

Harry was silent for a moment. “So those memories you sent me, those were…” he trailed off.

Draco felt his cheeks grow a bit red. “Those were real. I’ve always felt a draw towards you, but it wasn’t until after the war that I felt like there wasn’t an insurmountable obstacle between us, except there was. Because you were the Savior, and I was a Death Eater. In some ways, I’m grateful to that bastard for bringing us together,” he admitted, looking away. “But I’d like to think I’d eventually have worked up the courage to approach you without the pressure of mating.”

Draco hadn’t said anything so revealing to another person in a very long time, and his knuckles were white as he clenched his hands together. Eventually he dared a glance at Harry, and then Harry was leaning in and kissing him and everything was lips and tongues and teeth.

Harry took advantage of Draco’s gasp and plunged his tongue into his mouth, but Draco didn’t let him dominate the kiss for long, wrapping his wing tighter and then using his hands, tangling one Harry’s hair and using the other to yank Harry’s shirt out of his trousers and then slipping his hand underneath.

Harry’s hands weren’t idle either. Draco felt cool air brush his skin from where Harry was undoing the buttons on his shirt, and then hot skin when Harry’s hands delved underneath, gripping Draco’s
ribs and pulling him closer.

Draco tilted his head to get a better angle even as he started on Harry’s buttons, but when he tried to push the shirt of Harry’s shoulders, he realized that Harry was still wearing his jacket and robe.

Harry appeared to be facing similar issues. “Too, many, clothes,” Harry panted against his lips.

Draco agreed wholeheartedly. He pulled back long enough to pull out his wand and then Banished everything but their pants to the armchair. Harry jumped at the change, but when he realized what had happened, he relaxed.

Draco reached out, pulling Harry back into a heated snog. Their hands wandered further, one of Draco’s hands tangling back in the messy hair he couldn’t quite work up the energy to be bothered about and the other palming the hot, smooth skin of Harry’s lower back. Harry’s hands both went directly to Draco’s arse, pulling Draco bodily on top of himself.

Draco smirked against Harry’s mouth. “I guess you really do like my arse,” he murmured.

Harry’s lips traveled along Draco’s jaw to his ear, where he nipped the lobe. “You have no idea.”

It wasn’t until Draco’s hand brushed against Harry’s very hard cock that Harry tensed up again. Draco immediately pulled his hand back, waiting.

Harry leaned his forehead against Draco’s.

“Sorry, I just. I’m not sure I’m ready for that.”

Even though his own cock was begging for release, Draco sat back, resting his arse on Harry’s knees. “That’s fine, we don’t have to.”

Some of Draco’s disappointment must have leaked through, because Harry looked up in a panic. “It’s not that I don’t want to! I just, this is fast. Really fast.”

Draco nodded. “I understand, and I’m not upset.” Desperate, maybe. And he really couldn’t bring himself to be mad, because it was fast. And if his Veela hadn’t been practically salivating in the back of his mind, Draco would never have tried to go this far on what was basically their first date. And to think, I’m the one who wanted to do courting, to be traditional.

Reluctantly, Draco slid off Harry’s lap. He went over to the armchair and sorted out his clothes, pulling on his trousers and shirt. If he dressed a little slower than normal and bent over more than was strictly necessary directly in Harry’s line of sight, well. It was entirely accidental.

Draco left off his jacket and outer robe, draping them over one arm. When he turned back around, Harry was still sitting down, leaning back and looking extremely conflicted.

Draco smirked. “See you soon, Harry.”

He Disapparated with a loud crack.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? Feelings? Anything you're really hoping to see in future chapters? Let me
know!
Anticipation

Chapter Summary

Hermione was becoming less sure that humans were incapable of spontaneous combustion.

Chapter Notes

I swear that I really did have full intention of posting every week, but unfortunately I got a bad case of writer's block in the middle of this chapter. I'm sorry about the delay :/. I'm hoping that the next chapter comes along more smoothly. Thank you to everyone who commented/bookmarked/subscribed/left kudos! You all keep me writing! I'm setting a very tentative finishing date for the end of the summer, depending on how cooperative my muse is.

Hope you all enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hermione brushed the soot off her robes as she stepped out of her fireplace on Friday evening. After a long week wrestling with paperwork and incompetent Ministry bureaucrats she had been far too tired to Apparate without serious risk of splinching.

She dropped her bag, heavy despite a Lightweight charm, on the sofa before going into the kitchen and pouring herself a large glass of wine. She drank half of it standing against the counter before she set the glass down to make herself dinner.

Later, curled up in her armchair with a refilled glass and Crookshanks curled up in her lap, she pondered the book sitting on the table beside her and the bag full of work that she hadn’t moved. She blew out a breath. It won’t hurt anything to take a night off work. She picked up her book with a smile.

Hermione awoke the next morning with a start and a crick in her neck when a loud crack echoed through her flat.

“Merlin, Hermione, did you sleep in that chair?”

Hermione blinked blearily. She was quite sure Ginny wasn’t supposed to be in her living room.

“What?”

Ginny raised an eyebrow. “You know, that’s terrible for your back, and you should really make sure you’re in peak physical condition if you’re going to be keeping up with two very fit men.”

“What?”
Ginny frowned. “I don’t know how you can’t have noticed, I mean, they’re practically as fit as some of the Quidditch players I know.”

Hermione shook her head. “I, what?”

Ginny rolled her eyes. “Are you always this articulate in the mornings? Never mind, I’ll make coffee.” Ginny walked to her kitchen in a way that could only be called sashaying. “Don’t say I never do anything for you!”

Hermione blinked. She was sure things would start making sense in a minute. She put the book that was still in her lap on the table and then slowly stood up from the chair, her muscles protesting the change in position because apparently she had fallen asleep in the chair and slept there all night. At least she’d changed out of her work clothes.

She padded into the kitchen to find Ginny directing the coffee to pour into two mugs. Ginny glanced over her shoulder. “Oh good, you’re up.”

Hermione grimaced in disagreement, but the smell of coffee was awfully tempting. “I suppose.”

Ginny levitated one of the mugs over to her and Hermione plucked it out of the air. “Why were you sleeping in your armchair?” Ginny asked. She grinned suddenly. “Waiting up for someone?”

Hermione rolled her eyes, taking a sip of coffee. “No. I was more tired last night than I thought I guess.”

Ginny looked her up and down. “Resigning will probably be the best thing you’ve done for yourself in years.”

Hermione opened her mouth to protest, but closed it when she realized that Ginny really wasn’t far off the mark. *When was the last time I took time for myself without being coerced?* “Probably,” she finally said.

After they’d stood there sipping coffee silently for a few moments, Ginny started flicking her wand. Hermione’s fridge opened and eggs, bread, and other breakfast things floated out. Another few flicks and they started turning themselves into breakfast.

Hermione’s eyebrows went up. “Impressive.”

Ginny laughed. “You don’t live with my mother for very long without learning how to make very large quantities of food with minimal effort. Household spells were some of the first wordless spells I mastered.”

When they were both seated at the table with a plate of food in front of them, Hermione finally felt awake enough to question Ginny. “So, what brings you here this morning?”

Ginny licked a bit of jam off her finger. “Well, I was lying in bed with Blaise this morning, and he was doing something really delightful with his tongue and it occurred to me that you really need someone who will do delightful things with their tongue for you. It really has been too long since you dated someone, Hermione. And while eating dinner with Malfoy and Harry last night, I remembered that really, incredibly hot dance that you three shared a few weeks ago, and I thought that those two very fit men, who were far less subtle about their flirting last night than they thought they were, would probably do the trick. Especially because Malfoy couldn’t keep his eyes off of either of you on Samhain, or so I gathered before I dragged Blaise off to do some delightful things with *my* tongue.”
Hermione stared at her.

“Oh don’t worry, while Malfoy and Harry could barely keep their hands off each other last night I’m absolutely sure that they’d both like to do some really delightful things with their tongues for you. To you. With you. Really you should be thanking me.” Ginny grinned, taking a large bite of jam-covered toast.

Hermione spluttered. “What? You had dinner with Malfoy and Harry? And I don’t need anyone to do anything with their tongue!” she added, cheeks flushing.

Ginny gave her a quelling look. “Hermione, darling, you really do.”

“You didn’t answer my question,” Hermione persisted.

“Oh, yes, Blaise and I took Harry and Malfoy out for dinner last night. Blaise got us a table at the Griffon. I’ve been dying to eat there and it really was fantastic, although I don’t think your boyfriends noticed the food all that much, which is really a shame,” Ginny replied.

“They aren’t my boyfriends!”

Ginny rested her head in one cupped hand, the other holding her fork that she used to point at Hermione. “See, that’s interesting. Because last night, Harry told me that Malfoy was courting him, and based on how low Malfoy’s hand was on your back when you danced on Samhain, and the fact that you went to Samhain with Harry, I’d have to say that they’re not just interested in each other.”

Ginny grinned triumphantly. “Which means Malfoy’s also courting you.”

Hermione gaped at her. If we’d taken Ginny on the Horcrux hunt we might not have spent a year freezing in a tent.

Ginny raised an eyebrow and Hermione realized she had yet to respond.

“We, er, I, that is, we decided that, uh, it made sense?” Hermione said timidly.

Ginny raised an eyebrow. “It made sense? That’s quite a roundabout way of saying that you and Harry are Malfoy’s mates. But I must say that I am very impressed that Malfoy managed to talk you and Harry into letting him court you at all.”

“How did you figure it out?” Hermione demanded.

Ginny rolled her eyes. “I have eyes, Hermione. And besides, Blaise and Malfoy are best friends and Blaise confirmed that Malfoy is a Veela, and then it really wasn’t hard to put two and two together. So now, you have a lot of details to spill, darling. I can’t believe you didn’t tell me!”

Hermione fidgeted with her coffee. “I didn’t want to betray Malfoy’s confidence.”

“Well I think that cat has torn itself out of the bag now, so you have no excuse not to tell me absolutely everything. In vivid detail.”

Hermione flushed. “There really isn’t that much to tell.”

Ginny pointed a finger at her. “I don’t care. Vivid detail.”

Hermione blushed the entire way through a brief and very determinedly not explicit description of her interactions with Malfoy and Harry, though she glossed over most of the visit to Malfoy Manor.

When Hermione had finished her retelling, Ginny pouted. “That wasn’t vivid, Hermione. And leave
it to you to be seduced by a book.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “It’s not like we’ve had sex, Ginny. Malfoy wanted to be traditional, which means we probably won’t have sex until after the bonding ceremony. And I don’t know how long it’ll take the three of us to get comfortable enough to actually have a bonding ceremony. I didn’t even think Harry was ready to go public.”

Ginny snorted. “If you think those boys are going to want to wait until the bonding ceremony, you know a lot less about the male psyche than you should after growing up with two boys as your best friends. And you can’t tell me that you aren’t at least a little eager to get both of them naked.”

Hermione coughed, her face beet red. “Okay, maybe not that long.”

“I knew it! And as for the public thing,” Ginny added, “it’s probably better that you all go public together sooner rather than later. Otherwise Rita Skeeter and the *Prophet* are going to have an absolute ball dragging you through the mud, saying that you were “blinded by sex” or something. The more you show that this isn’t a sudden thing, the better. If you suddenly reveal you’re bonded, everyone is going to assume the worst.”

“They will anyway,” Hermione replied gloomily.

“Only if you let them control the narrative,” Ginny said firmly. “You just aren’t used to dealing with the press because you avoid them at all costs. Talk to Malfoy about it. I bet he has an absolute team of lawyers.”

“Are you sure?”

Ginny downed the last of her coffee. “Positive. But you and your boys should really have a talk anyway, because it seems like you’ve got things to work out. Feelings, logistics, sexual tension, et cetera.”

Hermione choked. “I don’t think that’s on the table quite yet.”

Ginny grinned. “I bet you five galleons that someone does something more with a tongue than snog before the week is up.”

“That’s still not sex,” Hermione hedged.

“I didn’t say sex,” Ginny pointed out.

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Fine, five galleons. Malfoy was the one who wanted to court, I don’t think he’ll move that fast.” Hermione thought of their very heated snog on Samhain. *Well, that might not be totally true.* But Ginny didn’t need to know that. And besides, that had only been snogging. *Really fantastic snogging.* Still.

“Hermione –”

Ginny was interrupted by the arrival of a large, familiar eagle owl. Hermione untied the note and then gave the bird a piece of bacon. When it didn’t immediately leave, she assumed it was waiting for a reply.

Hermione unfolded the note and blushed. When she looked up again after reading it Ginny was smirking.

“I wonder who that’s from,” Ginny said sweetly.
Hermione rolled her eyes but couldn’t keep from smiling a bit. “Malfoy wants to know if I’ll have lunch with him today.”

Ginny leaned forward eagerly. “Of course you will! What time?”

Hermione glanced at the letter. “One o’clock,” she said hesitantly. Ginny had a slightly manic gleam in her eye.

Ginny glanced at the clock on the wall. “Oh good, we still have plenty of time.”

“We?”

Ginny looked at her askance. “Obviously. You didn’t think I’d let you dress yourself for a date with Malfoy, did you?”

Hermione huffed. “I can manage.”

“That’s not at all the point,” Ginny replied. “I’m your friend and I want to help you get ready for your date.”

“Well, I guess that’s okay.”

Ginny rolled her eyes. “Why thank you.”

Hermione fidgeted with the note for a minute.

“Did you really have dinner with Malfoy and Harry last night?”

“Yes,” Ginny said, dragging out the word. “Why?”

“I’m just…surprised, I suppose. I really didn’t think they, er, we, would go public so soon.”

“It was hardly public.”

Hermione frowned. “You had dinner at the most exclusive restaurant in Diagon Alley. It doesn’t get much more public.”

Ginny shrugged. “It could have been the Leaky Cauldron.”

Hermione sighed heavily. “You know what I mean.”

“I do, but there’s a reason, besides the food, that Blaise likes exclusive restaurants. He pays the maître d’ extremely well to ensure that we aren’t disturbed by photographers. If a picture ends up in the *Prophet* today, they’ll have a very expensive lawsuit on their desk tomorrow. Part of what you pay for is privacy,” Ginny explained.

“Doesn’t that bother you, that he throws money around?” Hermione asked.

Ginny raised an eyebrow. “Are you asking about Blaise or Malfoy?”

Hermione grimaced. “Both?”

Ginny smiled. “No, it doesn’t. If Blaise wants to take me to expensive restaurants or buy me diamond earrings, then I’ll let him. I certainly don’t ask him for those things, because if I want a pair of diamond earrings then I’ll buy them. But he likes doing it. Did Malfoy buy you expensive jewelry?”
Hermione frowned. “Not exactly.”

“Good, because if he had then he doesn’t know you at all.”

Hermione smiled. *I guess he does know me, at least a bit.* “He bought me a book, like I told you.”

“And do you like it?”

“Well, yes,” Hermione admitted.

“But you feel like you’re taking advantage of him,” Ginny guessed.

Hermione nodded, resting her head in her hand. “That part of courting just feels so sexist and old-fashioned. It doesn’t seem right for him to buy me all these things without anything in return.”

“Firstly, no one said he isn’t getting anything in return, and I don’t mean sex. He probably considers it money well spent, if he even considers the cost at all. And you can buy him gifts too if you like, you know. Courting can go both ways. Secondly, are you with him for his money?”

Hermione straightened. “Of course not.”

“Good, then don’t let anyone else convince you that that’s why you’re willing to consider being with him,” Ginny said firmly.

“But Ginny, we hardly know each other. I mean, it’s one thing with Harry.” Hermione bit her lip, hesitating. “He told me that he has feelings for me.”

Ginny threw up her hands. “Finally! Took him long enough.”

Hermione couldn’t help but smile in relief. Even though they’d broken up amicably, she’d still been a bit worried about dating Ginny’s ex. “Well, it took me by surprise. But still, we’ve known each other for ages. And, well, I can see myself, um, falling in love with him. But with Malfoy, it’s all different.”

Ginny shrugged. “Of course it’s different. But no one is saying that you all have to fall in love immediately and live happily ever after. That’s not how real relationships work. But you’ve dated people you haven’t known since age eleven, just treat this thing with Malfoy like that.”

“But I have known him since we were eleven,” Hermione pointed out.

“‘Yes, but unless you want your entire relationship to be based on some really terrible childhood memories, I’d focus on getting to know the person he is now, rather than comparing him to the child he was.”

Hermione sighed and then smiled. “I really should have listened to you more.”

Ginny flipped her hair over one shoulder, smiling broadly. “Of course. Now, if you’re finished, we have work to do.”

*****

At five to one, Hermione Apparated to the front step of Malfoy Manor. Malfoy had told her in the note that he’d keyed the wards to allow her free access to the Manor and its grounds. *I wonder if that’s what I felt when I visited before Samhain?* It wouldn’t surprise her at all if Draco had planned ahead.
A house elf opened the door before she had a chance to knock, ushering her into the hall and taking her coat. Malfoy appeared just as the house elf Disapparated.

“Granger, welcome.”

“Hello, Malfoy.” She held out her hand, and she wasn’t at all surprised when he kissed the back instead of shaking it. The familiar tingle sparked up her arm, settling behind her heart in a warm glow.

He used his grip on her hand to tuck her arm into his before starting off into the Manor.

“How are you?” he asked.

“I’m... well.” At least physically.

“You sound uncertain,” he commented.

She glanced over at him, but he didn’t look like he was mocking her.

“It’s been a confusing few weeks,” she eventually replied. Which was true, but part of it was also being back in the Manor.

Even though she’d had the chance to face her demons, and despite the new, much more pleasant memories she’d created less than a week ago, she still had nightmares about being tortured in the Manor. And even though he was very different from the boy he’d been then, Malfoy still appeared in those dreams, though he looked nearly as tormented as she’d felt. The conflicting feelings roiled around in her mind as they walked down hallways lined with pureblood history.

They eventually ended up in the same room where they’d had tea before. It had been sunny then, but today flat grey clouds left the room dim, and Malfoy waved his wand to light the sconces on the walls.

Once they were both seated, a house elf appeared to serve tea before Disapparating again.

Hermione watched Malfoy from under her eyelashes as she picked at a scone.

“I heard you had dinner with Harry last night.”

Malfoy glanced up quickly from stirring his tea. “Oh?”

“I didn’t read it in the paper. Ginny came over this morning,” she admitted.

“Ginevra seems to be everywhere,” he murmured.

“You know, I think you are the only person who calls her that. And Ginny has far more talent for trouble than most people give her credit for,” Hermione said dryly.

Malfoy smirked. “Yes, I’m starting to realize that.”

Hermione took a sip of tea, trying to organize her thoughts. “I’m glad you and Harry are getting on.”

Malfoy’s mouth twisted in something between a smirk and a genuine smile. “He’s much more likeable than I expected.”

Hermione smiled. “He’s one of the nicest people I know, really. I think it’s hard not to like him. But I’m probably biased, of course, seeing as he helped save me from a troll when he hardly knew me.”
Malfoy quirked an eyebrow. “A troll?”

Hermione blushed. “Admittedly not one of my finer moments. I realize now that no matter how clever I thought I was, an eleven-year-old is no match for a troll.”

Malfoy shook his head. “You three got into so much trouble. It’s a miracle McGonagall didn’t have a stroke every year.”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “To be fair, most of it was unintentional.”

“I think it would be fairer to say that you didn’t start most of it,” Malfoy argued.

Hermione smirked. “Maybe.”

Malfoy smiled at her and she melted. Just a little. *He really is unfairly attractive.* He was dressed in casual robes of dark blue that set off his pale hair. His wings were out but tucked neatly against his back, and he’d made no move to show them off as he had last time. Still, the upper crests of the wings with their bright silver feathers gave him an ethereal appearance that was incredibly distracting.

When she realized she’d been staring for longer than strictly appropriate, she cleared her throat and looked away, taking a sip of tea.

“So, how have you been?”

Malfoy smirked, clearly not deceived. “I’ve been well. Business is good, although I’m currently in the process of hiring. I had to let a few people go.”

“Oh?”

Malfoy sighed. “The head of my Arithmancy Division was inadequate and one of my accountants was doing a very poor job of trying to embezzle funds. And I’m also looking for someone to liaise with some of the magical creature communities.”

Hermione brightened. “Oh yes! I remember Harry telling me about that a few weeks ago.”

Malfoy cocked his head. “Did he?”

Hermione fidgeted for a moment, unsure whether or not to tell him. *Well, you are his mate. It would be good to start trusting him.* “I’m resigning as head of the department. He thought I might be interested in the position. You are my last case, actually.”


“I just…I want to be doing something new. All I do anymore is paperwork, and it’s quite, well, quite boring actually.” Hermione gave a half-smile. “A bit silly, but I’m rather tired of sitting behind a desk in the Ministry all day.”

Malfoy shook his head. “Not silly at all. Do you know what you want to do afterwards?”

She shrugged. “Not yet. I think I’ll take some time for myself, though. And besides, with, uh, this,” she said, waving a hand between them, “it might be nice to take some time off.”

Malfoy smiled, a real genuine smile that lit up his whole face. His wings even fanned out a bit, stirring his robes gently. “I like the sound of that.”
“Ginny was right, he is bloody fit. “I mean, I can’t do nothing, of course. But it might be nice to be able to focus on my personal life for a while.” She blushed when he smirked. “But anyway, why are you looking for a liaison?”

Malfoy let his gaze, heavy with intention, linger on her for a moment longer before answering. “Many potions ingredients are found near magical creature communities or come directly from the creatures themselves. It helps to have good relations with the communities.”

Hermione nodded. “That makes sense. So you sell potions ingredients?”

“You sound very involved,” Hermione commented.

Malfoy shrugged. “I have to be, it’s the family company. And, like you, I don’t enjoy having nothing to do.”

Hermione smiled. “That must keep you busy.”

“More busy than I expected when I took the reins,” Malfoy said wryly.

They chatted until it was nearly dark and the light from the sconces was reflecting brightly on Malfoy’s wings and in his grey eyes. When she realized how late it had grown, Hermione reluctantly said that she had to go.

Malfoy walked her to the front hall, reeling her in when she extended her hand as they were saying goodbye. She gasped as she was pulled flush against his chest.

“I think we’ve advanced past handshakes, don’t you?” Malfoy murmured against her lips.

“It’s not like you ever shook it anyway,” Hermione whispered, voice breathy.

Malfoy smirked, his lips brushing hers. “Of course not.”

And then he was kissing her, his tongue flicking against her lips until she opened her mouth to let him in. As he kissed her breath away, she was intimately aware of everywhere they were pressed together. She was on her toes to compensate for the height difference and they were pressed together from thigh to chest and she could feel how hard his heart was beating. And how hard other parts of him are. Her cheeks heated.

Malfoy eventually pulled back, leaving her blinking and breathless.

“Well, uh, thank you for tea, Malfoy,” she finally managed to say.

Malfoy smirked, leaning in again. “Call me Draco,” he whispered against her lips, giving her a slow kiss.

She took a deep breath when he stepped away. “Right, Draco.” She smiled shakily. “Call me Hermione.”

Draco grinned. “Goodbye, Hermione.”
Hermione nearly stumbled out the door, still off balance. *Oh Merlin. Ginny’s definitely going to win that bet.*

She Disapparated with the feeling of Draco’s lips imprinted on hers.

Chapter End Notes

More sexual tension because I can’t seem to help myself :) Also, how would you guys feel about some outtakes from some characters that aren’t Harry/Hermione/Draco? There are some floating around in my head that I might post after the main story is wrapped up.

Thoughts? Feelings? Let me know!
Imperfect

Chapter Summary

If only he could blame it on the tea...

Chapter Notes

My muse if officially back y’all! I'm putting this chapter out mid-week, and I'm hoping to post another this weekend! Thank you all for your patience and your kind words and for sticking with this story! Special thanks to everyone who commented/left kudos/bookmarked!

I'm aiming for about 27 chapters for the whole main story, but that might get extended to 30 depending on how plot things unfold. Also, I realize now that the outtakes thing was confusing, so what I meant was that after the main story is wrapped up, I might post scenes from other character's view points. Ginny will definitely get her say, but I'm open to other suggestions too!

I realize this chapter might inspire mixed feelings, but I hope you guys enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry supposed he should be used to being left horny and desperate after seeing Draco, but it didn’t make attempting to sleep after Draco left on Friday night any easier. When he woke in the morning, still worked up and with a truly impressive morning problem, he took a rather long shower before going downstairs for breakfast.

An owl was already waiting for him when he got to his kitchen, and he absently flicked his wand to get the cereal and milk pouring itself as he untied the letter and gave the creature a treat.

Harry,

I wanted to apologize for my behavior last night – I’m very sorry if I made you uncomfortable in any way. I would never normally have moved that fast, but you were so very tempting and I’m afraid I rather lost control. Of course, I am quite willing to make it up to you however you like whenever you feel ready.

As for the courtship, our next meeting can’t be until next week, because I will hopefully be having lunch with Granger today, and then tomorrow I will be occupied with business all day. I would much rather be with my mates, but unfortunately the business won’t run itself.

If possible, I would enjoy a meeting with both you and Granger in the near future. I will owl you next week with details. Until then, think of me.
Harry grinned as he set the letter on the table and then went to fetch his only-slightly overflowing bowl of cereal, slurping some of the milk out to carry it to the table without making a bigger mess.

It was just as well that Draco couldn’t meet again soon, because Harry was woefully behind on his case reports, and Robards would have his head if he didn’t start turning his paperwork in on time. Although Draco is far more interesting than case reports. Better looking too. Harry pondered the way Malfoy had looked on Samhain. Maybe Robards would understand.

He spent the rest of the day working through reports, going over details and signing endless forms, putting the completed papers into his bag to take into work on Monday. He dealt with some of the questions the lawyers on the Dunham case had sent, making a note that the first official hearing with the Wizengamot was scheduled for that Thursday. Hermione and Draco would both have to be there, but somehow he doubted that was the kind of group meeting Draco had in mind. Fortunately, he wouldn’t have to notify them of the meeting himself, since the DMLE automatically sent out owls for things like that.

He was relieved when he finally set aside the last report an hour after eating take-out Chinese for dinner. The only respite he’d gotten from the monotony had been an owl from Luna reminding him that they were having tea tomorrow afternoon. It was as close to an actual invitation as Luna ever got, but he was pleased regardless, not the least because he knew Hermione would be there.

He slept much more soundly that night.

*****

Despite his really solid intentions to be at Luna’s house on time for tea on Sunday, he was still fifteen minutes late. He rang the bell with one hand as he tried to flatten his hair, which had been sticking up in every direction when he’d woken up that morning, with the other. He knew he wasn’t having much luck, but he figured it was the thought that counted.

Luna opened the door and Harry stepped inside, giving her a quick hug and only just managing to avoid getting poked in the eye by one of the spiky flowers woven into her hair.

“Hey, Luna, how are you?” he asked, tugging off his jacket and hanging it on a coat stand that looked like it was only partly alive.

Luna smiled beatifically, shutting the door. “Lovely, Harry, thank you. I’ve put the kettle on, so the water should be hot in a minute.”

Luna led the way into her sunny kitchen, warm despite the November chill. Hermione was already seated at the table with a cup of tea, making a face as she sipped.

Harry leaned over to kiss her on the cheek as he sat down. “Hello, Hermione. How’s your weekend?”

She smiled. “Not too bad. I worked at Pax a bit this morning, which was a nice change from department paperwork. Astoria really is a wonder, you know, she’s there almost every weekend.”

Luna nodded as she sat down, levitating the kettle and two more cups, placing them gently on the table. “Astoria has a good soul.”
“She does, but I didn’t realize that you knew Astoria well,” Hermione commented, brows furrowed. Luna cocked her head. “Oh I don’t, not really.”

Harry held in a snort. Getting a straight answer out of Luna was a hopeless exercise. He turned to Hermione. “Isn’t Astoria a friend of Draco’s?”

She nodded, her curls bouncing and catching the light shining in from the window behind her. It wasn’t something he would have noticed before, or at least, he wouldn’t have admitted to noticing, but now that he’d finally confessed his feelings to her, he felt like he could finally acknowledge all the little things about her that he’d admired for years. He was beginning to be able to picture a future with her, something he couldn’t have imagined even a year ago.

His attention was recalled to Luna’s kitchen table as Hermione replied.

“She is, their families have been friends for years. Astoria even told me today that her parents had been in talks with Draco’s to set up a betrothal agreement between them! She said she’s quite glad that Narcissa rebuffed their efforts.”

At Harry’s questioning look, because he couldn’t imagine not wanting Draco anymore, Hermione laughed. “She said she’s always thought of him as an older brother rather than a potential husband. And I think, though of course I’m not certain, that she’s inclined towards witches rather than wizards.”

“She is.”

Harry and Hermione both turned to look at Luna, who took a sip of tea with a benign smile on her face.

Harry shook his head and smiled ruefully at Hermione, who shrugged in reply and grinned.

Rather than trying to extract an explanation out of Luna, Harry changed the subject. “Did you get a notification from the DMLE about the Wizengamot hearing on Thursday?” he asked Hermione.

Hermione nodded, setting down her teacup with a grimace. Harry couldn’t blame her. Not only was Dunham an unpleasant topic, but Luna’s tea was oddly bitter and pungent.

“I got the owl this morning and I should be ready by then. Oh! And I’ll bring back those books I borrowed. I did have a chance to consult with a friend of mine who’s an expert in Arithmancy about some of the charts in Dunham’s journal and I’ll send over my notes on that tomorrow.” Hermione pulled a thick notebook and a self-inking quill from her beaded bag and made a note before tucking both away again.

Harry reached over and squeezed her hand. “Thanks for that, Hermione, I really appreciate it.”

He couldn’t help noticing that a tingle, similar to the one he felt whenever he touched Draco though softer, lingered where their skin had touched even after he pulled his hand away.

Hermione sounded a bit breathless when she replied. “No problem, Harry.”

Merlin, I want to kiss her.

The moment was broken by Luna humming an unfamiliar tune off-key as she stood up to go fetch a plate of biscuits from the counter. She set them down in the center of the table. “Beet biscuits,” she announced proudly.
Harry picked one up and warily took a bite. *Huh.* On the scale of Luna’s cooking, they were pretty good. He gave Hermione a nod to single the all-clear. She picked one up and then made a face after taking a bite. Luna, on the other hand, dipped one happily in her tea and Harry and Hermione both stared at her as she happily munched through the whole biscuit.

They looked at each other for a moment and then had to stifle the chuckles that threatened to escape.

Harry managed to make it through the rest of the visit without having another biscuit as Luna discussed some of the latest stories of the *Quibbler* and her most recent trip to Sweden. She and Hermione then had a somewhat heated, at least on Hermione’s side, debate about the ethics of searching out elusive magical creatures while Harry tried to find a more drinkable tea. The closest he got was rhododendron.

He and Hermione prepared to leave once the sky started growing dark. His stomach was starting to complain about having missed lunch and he was eager to get home and eat food that he didn’t have to question first.

“Thank you for tea, Luna,” Hermione said as Harry helped her into her coat.

Harry had to fight for his a bit, but a stroke from Luna had the coat rack releasing his jacket. “Yes, thank you Luna. Next week?”

Luna tilted her head. “Perhaps. Some of the threads are quite tangled.”

“Er, right. Well, I’ll wait for your owl then,” Harry said, stepping out to join Hermione on the front step.

“You should beware those who take flight without wings,” Luna added.

Harry nodded at Luna’s expectant look. “Of course.”

Luna smiled and then closed the door.

He turned to Hermione. “Do you know what that meant?”

Hermione rolled her eyes. “Not a clue.”

Harry grinned. “Glad I’m not alone, then.”

Hermione laughed. Harry admired the way a dimple appeared and her eyes seemed to shine even in the faint glow of the light from the windows and the lingering daylight. Without thinking about it, he leaned forward and kissed her like he’d been thinking about half the afternoon.

She immediately leaned in, her hands against his chest. She moaned softly as he nibbled her lower lip. Even though they’d kissed less than a handful of times, it felt as natural as if they’d been practicing for years. Her mouth parted underneath his and every inch of his skin felt like it might spontaneously combust.

Just as he brushed his tongue over her lip, his stomach growled loudly.

Hermione drew back, snickering. She laughed harder as he blushed, running his fingers through his hair. His stomach growled again, louder this time. She leaned her forehead against his chest, chortling and hiccupping as she tried to calm down.
“Hungry, Harry?” she asked, still trying to catch her breath.

“That was much smoother in my head,” he muttered.

Hermione stepped back and offered her arm with a faux-serious expression that was ruined by the twitching of her lips. “Come on, I better make sure that you get something to eat and don’t pass out from hunger trying to get home.”

“Very funny,” Harry replied dryly, taking her arm.

They Apparated into her living room, Hermione immediately heading into the kitchen. Harry took a seat on her sofa to wait for her. She returned after a moment holding a stack of brochures.

“I’m afraid that I desperately need to go food shopping, so it’ll have to be take-away,” she said, sitting down beside him. Right beside him.

Harry took the stack she offered, flipping through the menus. “Oh good, that sushi place delivers, how’s that sound?”

“Sounds good, as long as you don’t just order those really spicy ones. I like to taste my food,” she said primly.

Harry grinned at the familiar argument. “Just because it’s spicy doesn’t mean it doesn’t have flavor.”

“Maybe, but you can’t taste the flavor,” she argued.

They bickered through the whole ordering process, Hermione going outside to call with the mobile she’d recently bought. There was too much magical interference for a landline to work in her flat, but the mobile usually got service a few yards away. Harry had thought about buying one, but the only person he knew with one was Hermione, and it was easier to contact her by owl most of the time.

By the time the food arrived, Harry’s stomach felt nearly concave and as soon as they’d divvied it up, spicy to Harry, everything else to Hermione, he started gulping it down, heedless of his burning tongue.

“Don’t choke,” Hermione admonished him, eating her sushi much more delicately and with perfect use of her chopsticks.

Harry paused to chew and swallow. “I won’t,” he promised before going back to wolfing down the spicy rolls.

He finished long before Hermione and then leaned back into the sofa.

“I can’t wait for this trial to be over,” he said, blowing out a breath. Despite all the other distractions in his life, Dunham’s case was always in the back of his mind.

“Me too.”

Harry bit his lip. “You’ll be resigning after, won’t you?”

Hermione nodded. “Yes, I’ve already handed in my resignation. Not that Kingsley was happy about it, of course.”

Harry frowned. “It’ll be strange not seeing you around the Ministry. And I’ll miss our lunch dates.”
Hermione coughed, her cheeks flushed. “Well, if everything goes well, we’ll probably see much more of each other than rushed lunches.”

Harry grinned. “I hadn’t thought about it that way.” Going home to Hermione. Going to bed with Hermione. Waking up with Hermione. Now aren’t those pleasant thoughts. But of course, there was Draco to consider too.

“We’ll see much more of Draco as well,” Harry put in.

“Yes,” Hermione murmured, turning to look at him and chewing on her lip. “Ginny told me that you had dinner with Draco on Friday night,” Hermione finally blurted, setting down her plate.

“We did,” he said.

“Well? How was it?” Hermione asked, looking expectant.

Harry felt his cheeks go red, remembering how the dinner had ended. “Pretty good. Like a normal date, I guess.” Except my dates don’t usually end in snogging sessions on my couch.

Hermione raised an eyebrow. “Dates don’t normally cause you to blush,” she pointed out.

“They aren’t normally cause for interrogation either,” Harry muttered, embarrassed by his reaction. He wasn’t sure why he was reluctant to share details about his date with Draco, but even thinking about it was having an interesting impact on certain parts of his anatomy and he was finding it difficult to think straight.

Both of Hermione’s eyebrows went up. “Interrogation? I wasn’t aware one question could be considered an interrogation.”

“Er, I s’pose not,” Harry conceded, still embarrassed but regaining enough presence of mind to realize he was being weird about this.

“Did something happen?” Hermione asked, looking concerned.

Yes, quite a lot. Though not quite as much as I wanted. But did I want it? Part of him had very much wanted to sleep with Draco right then and there, but he’d also been nervous about jumping into bed with a man he barely knew anymore. “Not exactly.”

“Hmph. That’s descriptive.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Did you want a complete report, then?”

“No,” Hermione retorted. “I was just wondering how you and Draco were getting on, that’s all.”

“Didn’t you have lunch with him yesterday? Why didn’t you ask him if you want to know so badly?” Harry snapped.

Hermione frowned. “How do you know we had lunch?”

“Draco mentioned it in a letter,” he mumbled. He sensed they were getting into dangerous waters, but he wasn’t at all sure how to swim to shore.

“So Draco was comfortable telling you that we’d had lunch, but you won’t tell me about dinner?”

“Well it’s not like I asked about lunch, is it?” Harry said, annoyed.
Hermione flinched back, looking hurt, but Harry couldn’t figure out how to fix it, because the truth of it was that he wasn’t sure why he hadn’t told Hermione about dinner. Normally he owled her if he went on a date because they told each other everything, and that was when he was seeing someone that wasn’t well, courting both of them. Now that they were seeing the same person, and seeing each other as well…He just didn’t know how to handle this.

“No, you didn’t. And I suppose that tells me what I need to know, doesn’t it?” Hermoine murmured.

“What is that supposed to mean?” Harry demanded.

Hermione turned away to stare at the fireplace. “Nothing. Just, clearly, you and Draco are getting on just fine without me.”

“You just had lunch with him!”

She looked back at him. “Yes, a nice private lunch with no witnesses where we mostly talked about you!”

“So then why even question me about dinner?” Harry asked, voice rising in frustration.

“Because I wanted to hear your perspective! I was trying to be supportive.” Hermione snorted. “Apparently that was a wasted effort.”

“Ginny must be rubbing off on you if you want all the gory details,” Harry said snidely, vaguely aware that he was being unfair.

Hermione stiffened, looking angry enough to hex him. “I don’t want the gory details. I just want to talk to the people I’m dating! I’m trying to figure out how I feel about all this!”

“So you can talk about your feelings with Draco and not me?” Harry asked irritably.

Hermione jumped up. “I don’t know what feelings I even have now, Harry James Potter! I thought I was falling in love with you, but it seems like you and Malfoy are doing just fine on your own, so why don’t you go and talk about your feelings with him and leave me out of it!”

Harry stood up, frustrated and upset and confused. “Fine. I will then!”

Hermione jerked back. Her lips trembled, but the hand that suddenly held her wand pointing directly at him was steady. “Get out, Harry. If I wanted to be with someone incapable of understanding emotions, I would have stayed with Ron.”

A blast of cold air rushed out of her wand and shoved him unceremoniously out the door that then slammed in his face. Harry stared at the wood for a moment, the sound ringing in his ears, before Apparating away.

*****

Harry grimaced as bright light suddenly pounded against his closed eyelids. Fucking hell.

“You know, Potter, when I thought about having the Golden Boy as a mate, I thought that I’d be the one getting taken care of, not the one doing the caring.”

Harry groaned at the familiar but very, very loud voice. He managed to crack open an eyelid and saw Draco staring down at him, smirking. Oh double fuck.

“Where am I?” he asked, grimacing at the dryness of his mouth.
Draco handed him a glass of water and then helped prop him up so he could drink it.

“Malfoy Manor,” Draco replied dryly, perching on the edge of the mattress. “I should think that would be obvious.”

Harry glanced around as he sipped, but the room wasn’t familiar.

Draco sighed, apparently guessing his thoughts. “Not because of the room. Where else could you possibly wake up where I would be the one forced to play nursemaid?”

“Thought it might be a dream,” Harry muttered, wincing at the pounding in his skull that was now making itself known with a vengeance. “Or a nightmare.”

“How flattering.” Draco reached over and grabbed a phial off the nightstand. He held it up and Harry recognized the distinctive deep blue color of Hangover Potion. When Harry went to take it, Draco moved it away teasingly.

“Ah, ah, ah. You don’t get this until you give a coherent explanation for why you turned up on my doorstep at two in the morning ragingly drunk.”

Harry scowled. “That’s cruel, Malfoy.”

Malfoy raised a single, pale eyebrow. “So is interrupting my sleep.”

Harry sighed and quickly paraphrased his argument with Hermione, which had then resulted in him drinking most of a bottle of Firewhisky back at his flat. He did not remember choosing to or actually Apparating to the Manor.

“I’m surprised I didn’t Splinch myself,” Harry admitted once he’d finished his tale.

Draco smirked. “You did, but luckily it was only a bit of hair.” He nodded toward Harry’s forehead, and when Harry reached up, he realized some of his fringe was missing. “You must have been fairly determined to get here.”

Harry shrugged, because he didn’t really remember much of anything after the fifth glass of Firewhisky. “I guess.”

Draco eyed him for a long moment before snapping his fingers. A house elf appeared and Draco ordered that breakfast be served to them in the room.

Harry looked at him inquiringly as the house elf Disapparated.

Draco looked at him pityingly. “Firstly, I doubt you are feeling well enough to make it all the way to the dining room, and secondly, I’m not sure you want to face my mother yet, considering that she is, in fact, the one who let you in last night.”

Harry gaped in horror. That Draco had seen him completely pissed was one thing, but to have his mother see him that way?

Draco grinned, apparently enjoying Harry’s reaction. “Just as I thought. Now, you can have this,” he said, handing over the phial, “but you will not be leaving this house until you realize what an absolute prat you’ve been and figure out how to fix this.”

Chapter End Notes
Ahh, don't shoot!
Thoughts, feelings? Let me know!
Jealousy

Chapter Summary

Some would say patience was the key to healthy communication in a relationship. Draco knew it was actually manipulation.

Chapter Notes

Thank you to everyone who bookmarked/left kudos/commented! You are all so wonderful! This chapter took a little longer to write than I expected, but I think it came out alright. And now, dear readers, I have to warn you all that I will be going on hiatus until the end of July because I will be on vacation. This fic is NOT being abandoned - I will be back! If I have time/internet I might post a couple short outtakes, but I'm not sure I can guarantee a full chapter :/. Again, thank you all so much for sticking with me for so long! Much love, aethling.

As always, hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry glared at the phial for a moment before taking it from Draco’s hand. “I have not been a prat!” he retorted before downing the potion.

He looked like nothing so much as a sulky child denied a sweet and Draco had to resist the urge to grin, settling for raising an eyebrow instead. “Then why did you get ragingly drunk after fighting with Hermione and Apparate to my front step?”

Harry grimaced. “Well when you put it that way.”

Draco hadn’t garnered much actual information about the fight from Harry’s rather jumbled explanation, but he felt that he could safely assume that Harry was the one in the wrong, or he wouldn’t have drunk himself into a stupor. Now I just have to convince Harry to apologize. Given the mulish set to Harry’s mouth, still ridiculously attractive, Draco imagined that it would take a fair amount of coaxing. He looked forward to it.

Pinky, the house elf Draco had sent to get breakfast, popped in just as Harry was regaining his color. Draco directed her to set up the dishes at a small table beneath the large window on the far wall. She Disapparated as soon as the dishes were placed and once she’d left Draco stood up, allowing Harry to get out of bed.

Harry flipped back the covers and then glanced sharply up at Draco. “Whose pajamas are these?”

Draco preened inside at the sight of Harry in the forest green silk pajamas that Draco had had made for him. They matched Harry’s eyes perfectly, if he did say so himself. He hadn’t bothered putting on the matching shirt when he’d helped Harry into them last night – an event Harry obviously did not remember, although Draco recalled it in vivid detail – but the silk bottoms clung to the muscles of
Harry’s thighs as he swung his legs over the side of the bed.

“They’re yours,” Draco replied, voice calm, even if his Veela was purring contentedly.

“No, they’re not.”

It would be nice if Harry showed a little common sense, but no one was perfect. Did he think that borrowed pajamas would fit that well? “I had them made for you,” Draco explained patiently.

“Why?” Harry asked, frowning.

Draco shrugged negligently. So I could see you in silk. “I hoped that at some point, eventually, my mates would stay the night here. Call it optimism, if you will. And if that day, or night rather, came, and you were not…adequately provisioned, then I thought it might be wise to have something for you to change into. This was not, however, exactly how I hoped you might first stay the night.”

Harry snorted. “Optimism.” Apparently he was going to ignore the last part of Draco’s statement.

Draco reconsidered his approach as he led Harry over to the table. “Part of it was instinctual, the desire to provide for my mates. But I didn’t have them made until after Samhain,” he admitted. “Until I thought there was cause for optimism.”

“It’s only been a week since Samhain,” Harry pointed out, but he looked less skeptical.

Draco shrugged again as he sat down across from Harry. Patience was not a virtue he’d ever bothered cultivating and money could do many things, including procure bespoke clothing in less than a week. He opted not to tell Harry that he’d taken the liberty of having the tailor making a few sets of robes for him as well. Instead he gestured toward Harry’s cup. “Tea?”

Harry nodded, his attention clearly not on the food as he loaded his plate.

Draco poured tea for them both before filling his own plate. Harry dug in and it was quiet for a while as they both ate. Draco left Harry to his thoughts and occupied himself with a leisurely perusal of Harry’s bare chest. He didn’t know whether the DMLE required their Aurors to be in excellent shape or if Harry exercised of his own accord, but he certainly wasn’t complaining about the result. Although more wiry than bulging, seeker rather than beater, his muscles were defined from his forearms to his truly mouth-watering abdominals. Draco wouldn’t mind the chance of an even more intimate perusal, but he doubted that the opportunity would present itself while Harry’s fight with Hermione lingered over their heads.

Even the thought that one of his mates was upset made him itchy and uncomfortable as though ants were crawling over his skin, effectively dampening most of the lust he felt. He shifted his wings trying to alleviate the prickling sensation where feather met skin. It didn’t help, but it did draw Harry’s attention away from his plate.

Harry’s eyes flicked to Draco’s wings for a moment before returning to his face. He seemed to deliberate for a moment before asking, “What would you do, then?”

Draco had to bite back his initial snarky response. I wouldn’t have acted so stupidly in the first place. “Apologize,” he said instead.

Harry angrily stabbed at the eggs left on his plate. “I didn’t do anything wrong.”

Draco resisted the urge to roll his eyes. He could hear his mother’s voice in the back of his head going on about crossed eyes and manners. “This would go much more easily if we skipped past the
pointless objections and denials.”

“They aren’t pointless! She was the one acting irrationally!”

“And yet, you’re the one who very nearly got sick all over my foyer.”

“Because she drives me round the bend half the time!”

Draco smirked. *Well you obviously aren’t completely bent.* “I wasn’t aware that Gryffindors believed that one cannot fight with one’s friends.”

Harry glanced up at him, scowling. “What are you talking about?”

Draco gave in and rolled his eyes. “Have you two never fought before?”

“Of course we have,” Harry said, as though it should be completely obvious.

“So why is this any different?” Draco asked, taking a sip of tea.

Harry gaped rather unattractively for a minute before managing to choke out a reply. “She was being ridiculous.”

“Yes, you’ve mentioned that. How, exactly, was she being ridiculous?” Draco was beginning to have a rather poor opinion of Harry’s common sense.

“She was…she was jealous!” Harry announced triumphantly. “She’s jealous that we’ve spent so much time together and that we’ve been out in public together.”

Draco stored that information to ponder later. “And your response was to throw her feelings back in her face and make her feel even more insecure?”

Harry flushed. “I didn’t mean to. It just sort of happened.”

Draco raised an eyebrow, waiting for Harry to reach the conclusion he should have as soon as he woke up.

“I, uh, I guess I do owe her an apology,” Harry muttered.

*So there is hope for his common sense, after all.* “I would advise sooner rather than later,” he said dryly.

Harry sighed. “She won’t want to speak to me. I’ll send her an owl after work. Work! Fuck, I’m late!” Harry jumped up, very nearly oversetting his plate.

Draco was quite sure that an owl wasn’t going to suffice, but he supposed that Harry would find that out quite soon. He took another sip of tea, emptying his cup, before standing as well. “I may have taken the liberty of writing to Robards and telling him that you were here this morning, taking some final notes before the trial on Thursday. I made sure to mention how much of an inconvenience it was,” he added, smirking.

Harry jerked to a halt in his mad dash around the room. “You did?”

The look of surprise and, if Draco wasn’t mistaken, appreciation, on Harry’s face was deeply satisfying. “I thought it might be wise considering I wasn’t sure when you would finally wake up.”

“Oh thank Merlin,” Harry breathed, sinking onto the ottoman at the foot of the bed. “But I should
probably still get going.”

He didn’t sound particularly eager, but Draco sensed that he would feel guilty if he didn’t go in at all. “I have some clothes you can borrow, if you’d like?”

Harry glanced at him suspiciously. “What happened to my clothes?”

Draco sneered. “Those clothes are barely appropriate for working in the garden, let alone going to the Ministry.”

“There’s nothing wrong with my clothes,” Harry snapped.

“Aside from the fact that they fit poorly, have a number of holes, and are generally unattractive?”

Harry scowled at him for a moment. Draco considered it more pro forma than sincere.

“Fine, I’ll borrow some.”

Draco grinned. “Excellent.”

He walked out of the room and then down the hall to his own room. He kept the clothes he’d had made for Harry and Hermione in the back of his closet, hanging in neat rows and protected from dust and lint by preservation spells. He selected a basic set of black robes and then returned to the room he’d given Harry.

Harry looked up as he entered. Draco handed him the robes and Harry looked them over.

“They’re nice,” he finally said, grudgingly.

“Were you expecting otherwise?”

“I was expecting more frills,” Harry retorted.

“For Auror work? Don’t be ridiculous.” A couple of the robes Draco had had made did have quite a few more frills, but Harry didn’t need to know that.

Harry got changed and then after an uncomfortable goodbye that ended with an awkward, one-armed hug, took the Floo to his flat.

*****

Aware that Hermione, unlike Harry, would not have missed work because of a personal argument, Draco waited until an hour past the end of the work day before Apparating to her flat. A discreet inquiry to Ginevra had gotten him her address along with a truly frightening threat if he didn’t resolve things between the three of them. Blaise is welcome to her.

He knocked on Hermione’s door a few minutes past six.

She answered a minute later, clearly shocked. “Draco? What are you doing here? Is it about the case?”

Trust her to immediately think about work. “Good evening, Hermione. No, this is about Harry.”

Her face shuttered so quickly he wondered if Harry had already tried to apologize – or if he hadn’t. “I see. What about Harry?”
“I am aware that you two argued and I wanted to see how you were feeling,” he said solicitously.

“How did you find out that we fought?”

She still had yet to let him in.

“Harry Apparated to the Manor last night, completely pissed, and I managed to get the story out of him this morning,” he explained.

The tightness didn’t leave her shoulders. “I see.”

Draco resisted the urge to let out his wings to relieve the itch crawling up his spine. Hermione’s flat was in a partially muggle building and he didn’t think she’d appreciate having to call the Obliviators if one of them came out while they were talking. “Are you alright?”

“I’m fine.”

“That’s not an answer,” he said.

“Your point?”

That I want more than a two-word answer. “I just want to make sure that you’re alright. Harry was quite upset about your argument.”

“Was he?” she asked flatly.

Draco cursed Harry in his head. Obviously he hadn’t resolved anything. “Yes, of course-”

Hermione interrupted him. “Is this about us?”

“Us?”

“Yes, you and me. If you’re worried about whether I’ll reject you as a mate because of this, you don’t need to worry. This won’t affect my decision.” Her voice was clipped.

“That’s…good to know,” he said guardedly.

“I’m quite sure we can come to some kind of arrangement so that you needn’t compromise your time with Harry in order to meet your physical needs with my presence while I consider it. I can come to the Manor for, what, an hour a week, perhaps? We’ll probably need to do some tests to determine the time, but I’m sure it can be arranged.”

“That’s not-”

“If Harry disapproves, I’ll make sure to be there while he isn’t there. He made it quite clear that I am an intrusion on your relationship,” she said coldly.

Draco stared at her. This was not how he’d anticipated this conversation. “What about our relationship?”

Hermione regarded him silently for a long moment. “Do we have one? I hardly think two dances and a couple meals counts as a relationship.”

“Perhaps not a relationship but-”

“I didn’t think so.”
“Why don’t we all have dinner together?” Draco suggested desperately as she began closing the door.

She looked at him pityingly. “I don’t need to repeat my mistakes to see a pattern. I’ll see you at the trial on Thursday. If you have questions about the case before then, please owl my office between the hours of eight and five. Good evening, Malfoy.”

She closed the door in his face, the dull thud sounded like the toll of a funeral bell.

*****

Hermione didn’t respond to the letter he sent to her home on Tuesday evening, and Draco decided not to disturb her further. Even though his Veela was crawling beneath his skin, he knew that pestering her would only drive her further away.

He saw Harry twice, on Tuesday afternoon at the Ministry and then again for dinner at Harry’s flat on Wednesday. They went over details of the case and even though he was sorely tempted, he kept from acting on his impulses and left each time with only a kiss to the back of Harry’s hand. Any more and he wasn’t sure he’d want to stop. The thought that Hermione would hear about it and confirm her fears was enough to convince him to leave each time.

The hearing on Thursday was scheduled for ten o’clock precisely, so Draco arrived half an hour early. He descended to the dungeons of the Ministry and found Harry and Hermione standing an obvious distance apart on either side of the door to the courtroom. The Unspeakable guarding the door looked distinctly uncomfortable. Draco nodded at both of them, choosing a spot between them to wait.

As ten o’clock neared his palms grew clammy. Even knowing that Dunham would be surrounded by Aurors and chained to a chair wasn’t quite enough to calm the fear that was clawing its way up his throat. Although not the most unpleasant time in his life, his time locked in that house was not something he’d ever like to recall again.

Just before they walked into the courtroom, two more people joined them, he vaguely recognized one of them and the other was his own lawyer, Jasper Shylock, looking sharp and cool despite his late arrival.

The Unspeakable opened the door to the courtroom at precisely ten o’clock, allowing the four of them to enter. The wizard he didn’t know and Hermione both took seats at a reserved bench along the lowest row of seats, although there was no one in the spectator seats because Harry had assured him it would be a closed trial. Harry escorted him and Shylock to the wooden table set to the left of the raised chair in the center of the room where Dunham was already chained up, positioning Draco between him and Shylock with Harry between Draco and Dunham.

Harry had warned him it would be a full hearing, but even so, the sight of fifty-odd witches and wizards staring down at him was unnerving. He was painfully aware that the last time he’d been in front of the Wizengamot he’d been on trial for his crimes during the war. The Unspeakables waiting around the fringes of the room only intensified his feeling of unease, even though they were now there to protect him rather than restrain him.

Harry discreetly reached over and squeezed his hand as they stood, waiting for the Chief Warlock to come in and officially begin the trial.
Less than a minute passed before a door in the back of the room opened and the Chief Warlock, an old wizard whose name Draco didn’t remember, strode in and took his seat at the raised seat in the center of the Wizengamot. Everyone in the courtroom took this as their cue to sit.

A young wizard that was clearly one of the Weasleys stood back up after everyone had settled, holding a large scroll that he then read from.

“This hearing of the Wizengamot is called for the case on behalf of the defendant, Draco Malfoy, against the accused, Alfred Dunham. Chief Warlock Lionel Burnroot presiding. This court shall determine whether the aforementioned accused is guilty of those crimes with which he has been charged, namely: three counts of murder, four counts of kidnapping and torture, illegal experimentation, and possession of illegal and controlled substances without license. The defendant is represented by his lawyer, Jasper Shylock; the accused has refused outside representation and will represent himself. Lead case Auror Harry Potter will present the evidence.”

By the end of Weasley’s speech, several members of the Wizengamot were looking at Dunham with distinct distaste and a few with outright anger. Many more were neutral, likely waiting for more information. He was surprised that any had initially sided with him, and he wondered how much of that was having Harry on his side.

“Proceed, Auror Potter,” Burnroot said in a dry, gravelly voice.

Harry stood, holding a sheaf of papers. “On the morning of 23 September, I was called to an abandoned house in the Midlands after a routine patrol investigating a report of a disturbance at the house turned up evidence of habitation as well as the discovery of an unconscious being in an upstairs bedroom…”

Draco tuned out the rest of Harry’s description of events. While they concerned him, he had been over the details many times and he had no desire to hear them repeated yet again. Instead he studied the faces of the Wizengamot. Two or three had already fallen asleep, but they were the members who sat on the Wizengamot for the prestige rather than the power, old purebloods who refused to give up the seats to their heirs.

The Chief Warlock was impassive, but Draco remembered that he had voted in favor of Draco’s pardon. While that didn’t promise a favorable outcome, it proved that he was not overtly prejudiced against him as a former Death Eater. Not, of course, that Draco himself was on trial, but that he was the defendant might cause some of the Wizengamot to believe that he was exaggerating. *It is truly fortunate that Harry was the one assigned as lead Auror.*

When Harry finished his account, Draco was called to give his statement. He stood up, and even if he would never admit it aloud, he was grateful for Harry’s steady presence at his side. He didn’t look to the side at either Harry or Dunham, however. He spoke with a completely calm voice, even as he described the various spells that Dunham had used on him to “encourage” his transformation. Several witches and wizards looked ill and angry, which seemed promising.

After Draco finished, Hermione was called up. She stopped at the table beside Draco, and he could feel Harry tense beside him, but she didn’t look to the side. Instead, she faced the Wizengamot and immediately began to read aloud from her notes about her research into Dunham’s books and papers. He hadn’t been involved in that part of the investigation, and much of it was surprising.

*She looks delicious.* He shoved away the inappropriately-timed thought.

“Dunham’s notes make it clear that he was attempting to make himself into a Veela by the use of a combination of a spell and ritual, the latter of which required several rare and illegal ingredients. The
main component necessary, however, was a live Veela, from whom he needed to obtain blood, hair, and feathers. To this end, he captured wizards who, like Mister Malfoy, had dormant Veela blood that could be used to trigger a transformation. His first three victims died during the ritual and it is my belief that Mister Malfoy would likely have died as well if Dunham had performed the ritual with him, regardless of whether or not the ritual succeeded. Fortunately, however, the ritual and spell are both inherently flawed—"

“They are not!” Dunham screeched, his first words since entering the courtroom.

Burnroot banged his gavel. “Silence!”

Dunham flailed against the chains that bound him. “Flawed! My research is perfect! I would have succeeded and proved that magical blood can be transferred! I can make myself into the perfect wizard!”

“Silencio!”

To Draco’s surprise it was the Weasley who cast the spell.

Dunham was nearly frothing at the mouth as he continued to shout silently until he suddenly went still. His eyes flickered around the courtroom, touching on Harry, Draco, Burnroot, Weasley, the wizard who had entered with them, before eventually landing on a spot across the room.

“Continue, Miss Granger,” Burnroot said.

“As I was saying, the ritual and spell were both inherently flawed and these flaws…”

Draco’s attention was drawn by one of the Unspeakables walking up. Hermione glanced at him, frowned, and then continued reading from her notes. Draco assumed he was coming to maintain control over Dunham.

Draco turned back to face Hermione, tracing over her features, still beautiful even in the dingy lighting of the black-tiled courtroom.

He was startled when he felt a touch. He turned, assuming Harry wanted to communicate with him, but it was the Unspeakable; he had his finger on Draco’s shoulder and with the other he was touching Dunham’s shoulder.

Draco frowned but too late he realized what was happening as he felt a pull behind his navel and then he was suddenly ripped from the courtroom.

He was dropped to the ground in a clearing in a forest he didn’t recognize. He pulled out his wand but before he could cast two shouts rang out.

“Expelliarmus!”

“Stupefy!”

His wand flew from his hand and he saw the ground rushing up to meet him as he blacked out. *Fuck. Not again.*
I do feel terrible leaving things there...

Thoughts? Feelings? Let me know!
Fear

Chapter Summary

For the first time in years, reality is worse than her nightmares.

Chapter Notes

Oh you wonderful, wonderful people, thank you so much to everyone who stayed with me, your support has meant the world to me. I know it's been so much longer than I said, but I'm back and I'm ready to finish this fic! I cannot apologize enough for the long delay, but I ended up moving across the country and life has been a little hectic. Your encouragement has been absolutely amazing, and I promise I'll be finishing this story soon!

So much love to everyone who read/commented/left kudos/bookmarked, you are my inspiration and I wish I could send all of you chocolate and sunshine! I hope this chapter makes up for the long wait!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Hermione stared at the spot where Draco had disappeared as the courtroom erupted into chaos. Chief Warlock Burnroot was banging his gavel without effect, the noise lost among the shouts of the Wizengamot.

*I never told him that I’d chosen him.*

It was the first thought that formed as the air suddenly rushed into the space where three bodies had been. It was an unexpected realization, brought on by the shock of Draco being kidnapped from the middle of his own hearing in the Department of Mysteries.

A glance at Harry, who was now on his feet with his wand drawn, showed that he was shocked as well, shocked and frightened. She might not have seen the fear if she hadn’t known him since he was eleven and seen him in more frightening situations than she could count.

*“Silencio maxima!”*

The resulting silence was deafening. Robards, the caster of the spell, sent up a flare of red sparks to get everyone’s attention before flicking his wand to dispel the Silencing charm.

“No one leaves this courtroom until this has been sorted,” he ordered. He glared fiercely around the room before pointing at each of the doors in succession with his wand and sealing them shut. A few members of the Wizengamot grumbled at his order but Robards ignored them as he began barking orders into a bright silver orb he’d produced from within his robes.
The next four hours seemed to pass in a flash and interminably slowly at the same time, the distorted sense of time reminiscent of the middle of a battle.

The first thing Robards had done after sealing the doors was question her about the timeline of Dunham’s ritual. After informing him that Dunham would require at least two days to prepare his ritual, his flawed ritual, Robards and two trusted Aurors that he called in had questioned every member of the Wizengamot under a truth spell. When he judged them to be innocent he allowed them to leave. Not a single member of the Wizengamot appeared to have been in on the plot to kidnap Draco and they were all eager to return to their homes. The only one who stayed behind was Chief Warlock Burnroot.

Without prompting, he said stonily, “I will stay until justice is done.”

Hermione wasn’t sure whether or not she appreciated the sentiment.

Robards had been forced to question her, Harry, and Draco’s lawyer as well. They’d all been cleared quickly, but the questions he’d asked rattled around in her head.

Did she wish Draco or those connected to him harm? Was she aware of any plot to interrupt the trial prior to that morning? Did she know anyone that would wish Draco harm? Did she have any personal connection to Draco?

The last question was the one that gave her pause. It was the first time she’d admitted publicly that both she and Harry were Draco’s mates, something Robards had accepted with only a slow blink to show his surprise. Harry, standing a few feet behind Robards, had had no reaction at all.

But that disturbed her far less than the idea of Draco back in Dunham’s hands, even if Harry’s coldness felt like a knife in her lungs. But the thought of Draco at Dunham’s mercy after having read through that madman’s journals sent a cold flood of fear down her spine. Please let him be okay.

As she waited, her mind flitted through all the possible ramifications of Draco being taken and how the Unspeakable was involved, flashing from one possibility to the next without settling on any solution for how to get him back. What she needed was time and silence to work through the problem and then she was sure she could find an answer, but feelings of dread and terror kept clogging her throat and her mind, paralyzing her. It was the same horrible mix of emotions she’d felt watching Harry walk into the Forbidden Forest all those years ago.

A hand on her shoulder jolted her out of her thoughts. She forced her eyes away from the empty bench where Draco had been sitting, half expecting it to be Harry, offering some of that quiet strength she’d always admired, but it was one of the Aurors that Robards had called in. She shoved away the disappointment that it wasn’t Harry to the same small corner of her mind where she was keeping her fear.

“Robards is taking the Unspeakables up to the DMLE for questioning and he wanted to know if you’d be able to help with escorting them?” the Auror asked, removing his hand.

Hermione nodded mechanically. “Of course.”

As the five of them marched the nine Unspeakables who were left, disarmed but still dangerous, to the elevator, Hermione couldn’t help but notice that Harry had positioned himself as far from her as possible. That she wasn’t surprised didn’t keep her heart from breaking a little more.

Hermione was not allowed to participate in the questioning of the Unspeakables.
“You are neither an Auror nor an Unspeakable,” Robards said firmly. “Go home. Rest, do research, I don’t care, but you can’t stay here.” His face softened slightly a moment later. “If you stay you’ll only torture yourself. If we learn anything, I’ll send an owl.” He gave her a quick pat on the shoulder before disappearing into his office with Harry and the other Aurors.

Hermione knew that the only reason Robards was offering to send an owl was because she and Harry were now Draco’s legal next-of-kin, with the same rights as a spouse. She wondered if Harry knew that. *Not that that makes Harry and I anything to each other.*

Hermione once more shoved away those thoughts as she made her way to the Atrium and then took the Floo back to her flat.

Although it was practically supper time by the time she got home, she couldn’t manage to summon an appetite. She stared blankly into the cabinet and all she could see was the gleam of Draco’s hair and his bright grey eyes looking at her. Even though he’d probably thought he was being subtle, she’d noticed him staring from the corner of her eye and the trust in his expression had given her confidence.

She pored over her notes until she was too tired to keep her eyes open, looking for any clue of where they might have gone, but no answers appeared.

When she went to sleep that night, she had visions of Draco’s fair hair matted with blood and his bright eyes dimmed in death while Harry, covered in ash and blood, yelled that it was her fault, that she hadn’t done enough, that she hadn’t loved him enough to save him.

She woke with a gasp far too early and couldn’t go back to sleep. She lay in the darkness for hours, hearing the echoes of his screams.

*****

Hermione was back in the Ministry at six o’clock the next morning. The hallways were empty as she made her way to the Department for Magical Creatures. Because of Draco’s trial, she hadn’t come in yesterday morning, and although she’d originally planned to go in and work in the afternoon, it had been the furthest thing from her mind after Draco was taken.

When she entered her office, a stack of files and papers waited on her desk, shorter than it would normally be after a day away. She knew that was due to Felicia taking on a larger share of the work in preparation for taking over the department. Hermione had never been so glad about her decision to resign.

She quickly worked her way through the files that needed her signature and sign-off as the official department head. Several new cases had come in that needed to be assigned to various case workers and she had to approve the pending promotion of Felicia’s assistant to take over for Felicia once she took over Hermione’s job. All of it was busywork that did little to occupy her mind. Fortunately, she had no more open cases except for Draco’s, so she was finished in just over an hour.

After a quick stop in the Ministry canteen for coffee, she descended to the DMLE. She hadn’t received an owl from Robards about any leads or more information, but waiting around her office or her flat with nothing to distract her sounded even less appealing than having Robards tell her off for hovering.

When she arrived, far more Aurors were bent over desks and rushing around than was normal before eight o’clock. Burnroot was in a chair in the corner, looking tired but implacable. She couldn’t help glancing over at Harry’s desk only to see that it was empty. He was probably out chasing leads.
Hermione had spent more than an hour the night before debating whether or not to send him an owl, but every time she put quill to paper all her words dried up. *Would he even want to hear from me?*

Thoughts of Harry didn’t stop her from walking up to Robards door and knocking.

A terse, “Come in,” filtered through the wood.

Robards was alone when she went in, his desk covered in teetering stacks of paper while four owls waited on his window sill. He glanced up as she shut the door behind her.

“Granger.”

“Any news?”

She knew before he opened his mouth.

“No.”

“Any leads?”

Robards raised an eyebrow. “You know that you’re not technically cleared to be read into our investigation.”

Hermione gave him the look that she’d spent years honing on Harry and Ron. “I’m better informed about Dunham’s ritual than anyone else, and I was working on the case anyway.”

Robards sighed and set down the file he held, running his hands through his greying hair. “Fine. None of our leads have panned out. Portkeys aren’t traceable by standard means and this one obviously wasn’t licensed through the Ministry, although we did check. None of the Unspeakables seem to know anything, although one of them mentioned that the Unspeakable who disappeared with Dunham and Malfoy seemed to be acting strangely the past few days. Not that that helps us much now.”

Hermione frowned, pushing away the emotions that wanted to swamp her. “Strangely how?”

Robards slanted her a look as he cast a quick *Muffliato*. “We think he was Imperiused, although the Department of Mysteries claims that all Unspeakables who are cleared to work on trials and guard prisoners are given training to resist it.”

His distaste for the policy and the department was clear in his voice.

“Figures.”

Before Hermione could respond there was a frantic knock on the door followed by an Auror practically tumbling through. Hermione felt a faint pop as the *Muffliato* dissipated.

“Sir!” the Auror gasped.
“What, Auror Fitz?”

“We found where they went,” Fitz said, panting.

Hermione felt her heart stop.

Robards stood abruptly. “And?”

“They aren’t there but we think there might be magical traces that can lead us to them. Potter is there now with Peters seeing if they can track the traces.”

“Good. Get Fink, Carson, and Princely for backup. We leave in five minutes.”

“Sir,” Fitz said, nodding his head before dashing back out.

Robards glanced at her.

Hermione tilted her chin up. “I’m coming.” And you can’t stop me.


The only Apparition point inside the Ministry was within the DMLE. It was heavily guarded, its coordinates known only by the highest-ranking Aurors, and only used in emergencies. Three Aurors always stood around the perimeter of the circle of marble inside a room barely big enough to hold it. Hermione was waiting outside the door to the room when Robards arrived with Fitz, Carson, Fink, and Princely in tow. Fink was the only one she’d worked with before and she gave him a nod in greeting when he walked up. He nodded back and then they both turned to look at Robards.

He looked around the circle at the five of them. “Right, this is strictly reconnaissance until we can determine if the traces are useful. We’ll rendezvous with Peters and Potter before following any trails. Fink and Princely, you’re on perimeter so you’ll Apparate first. Carson and Fitz, you’re with me. Same with you, Granger.”

Fitz gave out the coordinates and then Fink and Princely entered the room, the pop of Apparition sounding a moment later. Carson and Fitz went second, and then Robards turned to her.

“Right. I’ll Side-Along you, Granger. When we get there, you will stay by my side at all times. Despite your experience, you are still a civilian and this is an official investigation, understand?”

“Yes,” she replied, shoulders tight.

“Good.” Robards pushed open the door and then tilted his head to indicate she should go in.

Once they were in the center of the circle, Robards pulled out his wand and offered his free arm to her. Hermione grasped it and then they were gone.

*****

They landed in a tiny clearing in a forest. The early morning light leaking through the grey clouds barely illuminated the small circle of grass and her breath created small clouds of fog in the chilly air. Carson and Fitz were waiting a few feet away, wands out. She didn’t see Fink or Princely, but she assumed they were already checking the surrounding forest.
Robards walked over to join the two Aurors and Hermione trailed along behind, glancing around warily. She pulled her wand out, but didn’t cast any spells, afraid to disrupt whatever traces lingered.

They stood in silence for what felt like a year even though it was only a few minutes until Harry and Peters appeared out of the gloom of the forest, followed by Fink and Princely. Hermione could tell the moment Harry spotted her. His forehead creased and his serious expression deepened into a frown.

She realized with a start that they hadn’t spoken since their fight nearly a week ago. They hadn’t gone that long with speaking in years. Hermione took a deep breath, fighting the way her chest had tightened, gripped her wand more firmly and then turned away to face Robards after giving a quick nod at Peters. She didn’t have the energy to be angry with Harry, not with Draco missing.

“Potter, report,” Robards ordered, either missing or ignoring the tension hovering in the air.

“It appears that the Portkey landed not far from here. There are magical traces of the Stunning spell, the Disarming spell, Mobilicorpus, and several traces of Apparition that have been disguised somehow. So far we have been unable to determine the destination of the Apparition,” Harry reported, voice calm and detached.

“Right, lead the way.”

Harry and Peters guided the group through the underbrush to a spot not far away, a slightly larger clearing near a stream. Under different circumstances it might have seemed almost idyllic. Under the circumstances it just felt eerie. Fink and Princely immediately split up to take watch, their backs to the clearing.

Peters pointed out the indentations in the soft ground where it was clear the three of them had landed the day before. Robards cast the spell that revealed the faint glowing threads of spell traces floating through the air. Some looked more like tangled knots and Hermione could recognize those as being caused by Apparition. Portkeys didn’t leave spell traces at their destinations, only at their place of departure.

Hermione was sure that the Unspeakable, at least, would have known that, although Dunham might have as well. With the amount of research he’d done into magical theory, it was entirely possible he’d been prepared in case he was ever discovered and had to escape. She just wasn’t sure if he’d prepared for the possibility of being arrested by the Ministry. He hadn’t seemed fully sane enough to have so many contingency plans, let alone ones that were so well thought out.

Two magical signatures predominated – most likely the Unspeakable and Dunham, though it still wasn’t clear whether the Unspeakable was under the Imperius curse. There was only a sliver of a third magical signature, almost certainly Draco’s, and Hermione thought it was likely that it was the result of his Veela magic coming out to protect him rather than a proper spell.

Robards and the other Aurors began sorting through the traces, tossing out theories and ideas. Not having had the training to sort through spell traces accurately and identify them, Hermione let her mind speculate as she listened with half an ear.

It seemed odd for Dunham to have chosen to land there. While isolated, which was useful, the clearing wasn’t a good place to conduct the ritual, let alone stay the night so late in the year. And even though there were traces of Apparition, if Dunham had had the sense to use a Portkey to escape from the Ministry, it was far more likely that he would have used another Portkey to get to his final destination, rather than Apparition, which was much easier to track.
Hermione tuned back into the conversation to hear them arguing over the usefulness of following any of the Apparition trails.

“Is there any trace from a Portkey?” she interrupted.

All five of them looked at her.

“Portkeys don’t leave traces where they land,” Carson said, just this side of sneering. She could practically hear the derision in his voice.

“No, they don’t. But it would make far more sense to leave another Portkey here to transport them to wherever Dunham plans to perform the ritual than to try to Apparate with an unconscious Veela, leaving an easy trail to follow. And it’s also possible that the first Portkey couldn’t take them the whole way,” Hermione explained.

Everyone was silent for a moment before Robards responded. “Good point, Granger. Carson, scan for traces of a Portkey,” he ordered.

Carson glared at her before obeying Robards.

Robards turned to her with an eyebrow raised. “Any other thoughts, Granger?”

Hermione frowned in thought. “Dunham won’t go back to the house he used before, but he’ll need a similar space. And in order to be able to do the ritual in two days, he’d need a place that was already prepared. Have you looked into the Unspeakable? Where he lives, if he’s been spending time anywhere? If he’s rented or bought property recently? If he’s under the Imperius curse, Dunham might have commanded him to get the ritual ready.”

Robards grimaced. “We tried to get records about the Unspeakable from the DoM, but they won’t turn them over. I’d have to get a direct order from the Minister to get the department to hand them over.”

“I can get Kingsley to issue one,” Harry said quietly, looking only at Robards. Part of Hermione wished he’d look at her, if only for a moment.

Robards gave him a sharp look but nodded. “Good, do it.” He looked up as Carson walked back over. “Well?”

“There are traces of a Portkey. They’re not very strong, though. The Portkey probably wouldn’t have been able to go more than fifty miles from here, not carrying three people, anyway,” Carson replied.

“That’s something, at least. Good work.” He looked around the clearing. “Right, well there’s nothing left for us to do here. Fitz, Carson, Peters, head back to the Ministry, start combing the archives for any recent property purchases within seventy-five miles of these coordinates. Potter, get that order from the Minister.”

Within a minute, all three had Disapparated.

“Princely, Fitz,” Robards called.

They two Aurors returned from their posts guarding the perimeter. “Return to the Ministry, start working on the report and keep the pressure on the Department of Mysteries. See if you can get anything else out of those Unspeakables.”
They Disapparated as well, leaving just her and Robards, the clearing silent in the wake of the cracks of Apparition.

He eyed her sternly for a moment before speaking. “Look, Granger. If or when we find where Dunham and Malfoy are, you can’t come along. We cannot bring a civilian on a raid. I know you have a…personal interest in this case, but you know as well as I do that you’d be a risk.”

Hermione’s lips tightened. She hated that he was right. “Yes, I know. And I appreciate you allowing me to come today.”

“You’ve been a great help today and during this case, but you’ll only get yourself or someone else hurt if you don’t step back. We’ll get Malfoy back and make sure Dunham is locked up forever, I promise you that.”

Hermione grimaced but accepted his statement. “Alright.”

“Good. Now, go home.”

Hermione looked around the clearing one last time, imagining Draco lying there, helpless. Tears pricked behind her eyes but she couldn’t tell if they were from anger or despair. She could almost hear the sound of him hitting the ground, the screams from her nightmares filling the woods as he collapsed.

Feeling like she was abandoning him, Hermione Disapparated.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? Feelings? As always, let me know!
Betrayal

Chapter Summary

Harry couldn't help but feel like he was cursed to forever lose the people close to him.

Chapter Notes

Well, this chapter wasn't finished quite as soon as I'd hoped, but here it is finally! I will finish this fic, I promise, I am not abandoning this story. As always, thank you so, so much to everyone who's stuck with me! Sparkly rainbow hugs to everyone who commented/bookmarked/left kudos, your support and encouragement mean the absolute world to me. This chapter is quite a bit longer than the others, so hopefully that makes up a bit for the long wait! We are getting very close to the end, I think probably another three-ish chapters.

Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“Kingsley, I need a favor.” Harry stood in front the Minister’s desk, hands clasped behind his back and shoulders straight. He ignored the fact that his boots were still muddy from the forest and probably leaving stains on the carpet.

Kingsley leaned back in his chair. “What kind of favor?”

“I need you to issue an order for the Department of Ministries to turn over files for one of their Unspeakables.”

One of his eyebrows went up. “That’s a big favor.”

“I know.”

Kingsley nodded and then was silent for a moment. “Very well. But this isn’t a favor I give lightly.”

“I understand.”

“Good.” He pulled out a fresh sheet of parchment with the seal of the Minister at the top, the ink glimmering in opalescent colors. He quickly wrote out the order, signing it with the same opalescent ink.

Kingsley waited a moment for it to dry before handing it over. Harry read it over quickly and then nodded.

“Thank you, Minister.”
Harry returned to the DMLE to give the order to Robards, and then settled in to work, searching for any clue that could lead them to Draco.

When he glanced up again, he realized it was entirely dark and that most of the day Aurors had long since gone home. Harry himself hadn’t gotten more than a couple of hours of sleep since Draco had been kidnapped nearly two days ago. His eyes felt gritty and he knew he needed a shower but he couldn’t justify going home, not when Draco was out there, back in the hands of a madman. It was late, so late it was probably going on early, and his was one of the few lights left on in the office except for the Aurors working the night shift, their soft voices rippling through the stillness of the air.

“Potter.”

Harry looked up to see Robards standing beside his desk. He stood up quickly.

“Sir.”

“Go home.”

“Sir?”

Robards rubbed a hand over his face. “I am not a mother, Potter, and you are not a child. Go home, take a shower. Sleep. You know the rules, and you know the dangers of working too much.”

Harry frowned. “But sir, the longer we wait the higher the chance that Dunham’s trail will go cold. We only have two days until the ritual-”

“I am aware, Auror Potter. And several of the Aurors who are scheduled to be here right now are working on the leads we have. You’re only going to strain yourself.”

“I really think- ”

“I don’t give a rat’s arse, Potter. Go home. That’s an order. I swear, between you and Granger I’m going to have an aneurysm someday. If I see you before seven tomorrow morning I will send you home. Understand?”

Harry’s frown deepened at the mention of Hermione. “Understood, sir.” He bent down to collect some of the files but Robard slapped a hand down on his papers.

“No work. You are going home to rest, not work more. Now get out.”

Harry resisted the urge to scowl at his commanding officer. “Yes, sir.”

He gathered up his cloak and wand, nodded at Robards, and then left the office. He took the Floo to his flat and then collapsed on his bed, passing out in minutes from sheer exhaustion.

*****

Harry started awake the next morning when his wand alarm went off at half seven. He jolted up in bed, feeling only slightly less tired than he had when he’d gone to sleep. Looking down, he realized that he hadn’t actually undressed at all except for his shoes before falling into bed. He flicked his wand to make the alarm stop and then stumbled out of bed into the bathroom. He came out feeling a bit more awake and quite a bit cleaner, his hair messy as ever but no longer oily.

When he arrived at the DMLE a little after eight, the department was busy. Three new reports were on his desk, all of them about Draco’s case. He read through them quickly, pausing on the last one.
Hastily, he searched through the files on his desk until he came up with the notes from his trip to the clearing. After double-checking it against the new report, he hurried to Robards’ office clutching the parchments. He knocked hard on the door.

“Enter.”

Harry nearly tumbled into the office. Robards looked up from a stack of reports, eyebrows drawn down in a familiar expression of stress.

“Report, Potter.”

“I think I’ve got their location.”

Robards eyes sharpened. “Where?”

“An old Death Eater manor was purchased three months ago forty-three miles from the clearing. The buyer’s name was kept private on the sale, but with the order from Kingsley, the DoM turned over their files on the Unspeakable guarding Dunham, and he made a withdrawal of the same amount as the sale from Gringotts the day before the sale went through.” Harry handed over the papers with the information.

Robards flipped through them. “Is there any confirmation on the location?”

“Peters went to investigate the house and there were lights on and signs of habitation on the ground floor. There’s no floor plan, but it’s likely that the manor has a basement where the actual ritual is to be conducted. Peters couldn’t get closer than fifty feet to the house due to a defensive spell that circled the entire manor.”

“Good work, Potter.” Robards stood up and strode around his desk. Harry stepped aside to let him through.

“Attention!”

All activity in the room stopped.

“We have a suspected location on the missing accused, Alfred Dunham. We are launching a recovery team now to apprehend him. The suspect could be armed and dangerous, and he is likely to be in the company of an Unspeakable who could also be armed and dangerous. Alpha, Beta, and Delta teams, assemble in ten minutes.”

Harry rushed back to his desk and began getting ready. He pulled on the long black Auror coat that was spelled to protect against offensive spells, fire, and water, and then filled the interior pockets with extra charms and a few knives. While wands were useful, Harry had grown up as a muggle, and he knew the value of having an extra trick up your sleeve, especially when going up against someone as unpredictable as Dunham.

Buttoning up his coat, he went to meet with the rest of Alpha team in the large entrance hall of the department. By the time Robards appeared, everyone had assembled, divided into three groups. Each team was made up of ten Aurors, each selected to carefully complement the abilities of the other Aurors in the group. Each group was designed to be self-sufficient when acting as a unit.

Robards took a position facing the three groups, wearing a nearly identical black coat, though his had the three maroon stripes on the sleeves that marked him as Head Auror. After briefing them on the situation, Robards gave out assignments.
“Right. Alpha team, you’re on entry. Your main goal is to find Dunham, Malfoy, and the Unspeakable. Dunham and the Unspeakable are both to be taken into captivity. Lethal force is not authorized. Malfoy is to be retrieved, but he may not be in a position to be moved. A message has been dispatched to St Mungo’s for a medic to be on standby once the site is secure. Beta team, you’re on defense. Watch the perimeter, make sure there aren’t any surprises waiting for us. Delta, you’re on escape watch. Everyone clear?”

A chorus of “Yes, sir” resounded through the room.

“Good. We’ll be Apparating from the Atrium. Peters, coordinates.”

Peters, who’d done the reconnaissance on the mansion and was also head of Beta team, stepped forward and gave out the coordinates for the Apparition location and a rough description – a field far enough from the house to avoid detection.

“The jump is about one hundred miles,” Peters said. “And be careful on the landing, because it’s likely to be damp.” Information given, he stepped back to join his group.

“Thank you.” Robards looked around at all of them. “Good luck.”

With that, he led the way up to the Atrium, taking the stairs rather than waiting for the notoriously slow lifts that would never have been able to fit all thirty of them anyway.

The Atrium was busy, but people moved out of their way quickly once they saw the Auror robes. Several attendants stepped forward and moved people to the side to clear a space for their group to Apparate. Beta team Apparated first to make sure the perimeter was secure. The crack of ten people Disapparating at once was deafening, echoing off the marble walls.

After five minutes, Harry and the rest of Alpha team Disapparated, following the traces of the previous group.

They landed in a field surrounded by low hills, the sky an unfriendly gray. The roof of the mansion was just visible over the rise of one of the hills. A cold breeze whipped through the air, biting into Harry’s face and hands. He stuck his left hand into his pocket, keeping his wand out and ready in his right. Beta team was already gone, off checking the perimeter. Only two Aurors, Binker and Sage, had remained behind to guard the Apparition point. Harry and the rest of Alpha team moved out of the way, leaving room for Delta to Apparate in behind them.

They waited in silence until Delta team Apparated in, their appearance nearly soundless except for the outrushing of air. Robards, who’d Apparated with them, immediately went over to Binker and Sage. He talked with them quietly for a moment before nodding and climbing up the hill that closest to the mansion, flattening himself down to look.

Meanwhile, Delta walked over to join Alpha. Beaumont, the lead Auror of Delta, came over to stand by Harry since he was in charge of Alpha. Harry nodded at him and then they both took up ready stances.

Robards came down from the hill after watching for a few minutes, and then pulled out a small glass globe from an inner pocket of his robe, the silver mist inside swirling. He tapped it with his wand and then held it up to his ear to listen. After a moment he put the globe away, the mists now still, and then strode over to Harry and Beaumont.

“Peters reports that there are quite a few protections scattered around the perimeter and on the house itself. Beta has disabled all but the ones attached specifically to the house. We don’t want to alert
Dunham that we’re here until the last moment.”

Harry nodded.

“Any way of telling if both Dunham and the Unspeakable are armed?” Beaumont asked.

Robards shook his head. “No. But assume they are.” Robards turned to face the rest of the Aurors who all immediately snapped to attention with only a rustle of fabric. He pitched his voice low, just loud enough for everyone to hear without the sound carrying beyond the low hills ringing them.

“Beta reports that there are at least two people inside, probably Dunham, Malfoy, and the Unspeakable. The magical defenses have been disabled but be on your guard. Dunham’s almost certainly started on his ritual and I don’t need to remind any of you of the dangers of disturbing a magical work in progress. Aside from that we’re going in blind, so have your shields ready. As soon as Peters gives the word that Beta is in position we’ll be going in. Any questions?”

Harry’s heart lurched when Robards said Malfoy’s name, but he ruthlessly pushed back any thoughts or emotions that could impair his focus. He couldn’t afford to be distracted, not with Malfoy’s life on the line.

No one asked any questions, and so they stood in silence, Robards holding his glass sphere. The silver mists were still for long moments as Harry stood, listening to the wind and wondering if the whistling of the breeze was masking the sound of Malfoy’s screams.

Finally, the mists inside the sphere started swirling and Robards held it up to his ear. He nodded sharply and then tucked it away again inside his robes.


Harry and the rest of Alpha moved quickly over the hill, wands up. The mansion immediately loomed large, towering over the surrounding countryside, bleak and decrepit. He felt the rush as the Anti-Apparition wards went up and he knew that the wizards inside the house would have felt it as well. He started running, the rest of Alpha following his lead.

The front door was only a hundred yards from the hill but the run there felt like some of the longest seconds of his life.

When they reached the door, Harry took up position in front of it, Aurors flanking him on each side. He nodded at them and then cast Alohomora, surprised when the door swung open. Immediately the wizard at his right cast Protego, covering the three of them as they went through the door, the rest of Alpha following. Harry didn’t have to look to know that the last three would be watching their backs.

The door opened into an empty foyer, the floor tiled in cracked marble. Shadowed columns rose toward the ceiling in two rows to either side, hallways leading off to the right and left with a staircase sweeping upstairs straight ahead. Harry cast Homenum revelio, moving his wand in a wide arc. Two signatures flickered faintly to the right. Light spilled from the gap beneath the door. No noise came out, but it was entirely possible there was a muffling spell in place.
Harry looked back at the other Aurors, their faces all set in identical lines of focus. He used hand signals to indicate the plan, then stepped back, allowing the two Aurors who’d been flanking him to take his place. As one, they burst through the doors while the two Aurors behind them stepped through in their wake, casting Stunning spells simultaneously.

Harry came through afterward with two more Aurors, the final three remaining in the hall to stand guard. Vinkelhorn, one of the Aurors who’d gone through first, was on the ground, his leg bleeding heavily. Dunham had been caught by one of the Stunners and was frozen awkwardly on the ground, face pressed against the threadbare carpet.

The Unspeakable had managed to deflect the first round of Stunners and was pressed against the far wall, wand out in front of him. His face was twisted up into something between hatred and fear. Harry frowned. Even though it was possible he was under the Imperius curse, he seemed very aware of himself.

Harry was the first to break the stalemate.

“Stupefy!”

“Stupefy!”

“Impedimenta!”

“Protego!”

“Locomotor mortis!”

“Crucio!”

“Expulso!”

“Stupefy!”

Though clearly a skilled duelist, the Unspeakable was no match for six fully trained Aurors. The final Stunner caught him as he tried to dodge the Expulso curse, sending him crashing to the ground. One of the Aurors stepped up to bind him, conjuring ropes and sending them winding around his hands and ankles tighter than was strictly regulation, but Harry wasn’t about to call him out. Another bound Dunham, who was still Stunned but starting to fidget, and a third went over to Vinkelhorn to help staunch the blood and heal him enough so that he wouldn’t bleed out before they could get him to a proper Healer.

Harry took all this in as he scanned the room, wand still out and ready. He examined the room, noting the many books and papers scattered around, along with quite a few phials and bottles filled with nasty-looking things. But there was no sign of Draco.

He pulled out a small glass globe filled with silver mist from his pocket, identical to the one Robards carried. After tapping it with his wand and murmuring Robards name, he started speaking into it, the mists spinning faster with each word.

“Dunham and the Unspeakable both in custody. One Auror down, Healer required. No sign of Malfoy, search in progress.”

He tapped his wand against the globe again to send the message.

Message sent, Harry cleared his throat, catching the attention of the other Aurors in the room.
“Secure the room and the prisoners. Get the Healer from St. Mungo’s here and make sure there’s nothing nasty waiting for him outside. Eliander, Rasten, with me.”

A chorus of nods and sirs met his orders. Eliander and Rasten paused in their work of examining the room to join him by the door.

“We’re going to search for Malfoy. Stay alert, there might be traps,” Harry told them.

He exited the room with Eliander and Rasten following. He nodded at the three Aurors guarding the door, knowing they’d heard his orders. They nodded back respectfully and then returned to their watch.

He knew a simple *Homenum revelio* wouldn’t show them Malfoy’s location. Hermione had told him once that that spell didn’t work on anything with non-wizard blood. Well, she’d started by ranting about how the Ministry was a bunch of old-fashioned, racist speciesists who had no understanding of genetics, but what he’d remembered was that something like a troll or a giant or a Veela wouldn’t show up if that spell was cast.

Thoughts of Hermione very nearly jarred him out of his focus. He’d managed to avoid thinking about her for nearly a day, too concerned with finding Malfoy before Dunham did something horrible to him. But of course she’s probably concerned too. Probably worried out of her mind, because she’s his mate too.

Harry gripped his wand tighter and ignored the sick feeling in his stomach at the thought of Hermione sitting in her flat, worried and alone. He couldn’t think about that. He shook his head and pushed forward.

They continued down the hall, but the amount of dust they stirred up from the carpet practically ensured that Draco wasn’t being kept in one of the rooms they passed, though they checked every one. When they reached the end of the hallway they turned around.

“Right, let’s check the other hall,” Harry said.

When they crossed from the foyer into the left-hand hallway, he could feel the difference immediately. Something shimmered in the air and Harry froze, casting a detection spell. It revealed a web of spells and traps filling the corridor – if he’d taken another step forward he would have been caught in a particularly nasty jinx. Behind him, Eliander cursed.

“Bugger me.”

Harry agreed. It would take days, maybe even weeks, to dismantle that many curses and jinxes, especially without knowing how they were layered or what to expect if they accidentally triggered one. They’d need to get an experience cursebreaker, possibly more than one. Theoretically there would be a way to dissipate them all at once, but that way was usually known only to the wizard who set the spells and there was no way to know whether that was Dunham or the Unspeakable. *And in the meantime, Draco could be suffering horribly somewhere in there.*

“This could be a distraction,” Harry said, though he sounded unconvinced even to his own ears. “Let’s check the rest of the house.”

It didn’t take long to check the rest of the manor and confirm what Harry already knew. The two upper floors were almost entirely undisturbed and the way some of the floorboards creaked beneath them as they checked all the rooms made it clear why they hadn’t been used. Back on the ground floor, the kitchen was empty though there were signs of use, and the basement proved to be empty as
well except for a few rats that scurried away at the sound of their footsteps.

When the three of them made their way back up to the ground floor from the basement they found Robards and the rest of Alpha standing in the foyer. Dunham and the Unspeakable were kneeling, restrained, with three Aurors guarding each of them. The Healer from St. Mungo’s had arrived and was standing beside Robards talking quietly.

Harry strode up to Robards, who broke off his conversation with the Healer.

“Report.”

“The upper floors and basement are clear. We believe that Malfoy is being held in that hallway, and that is likely where the ritual preparations are.” Harry pointed to the left-hand hallway. “A detection spell revealed an extensive set of traps and curses, the number and severity of which make attempting to dismantle the curses immediately unwise.” The detection spell had worn off, so the traps no longer glowed, but Harry could still feel a sort of wrongness now that he was attuned to it.

Robards grimaced and then strode over to the hallway, not stepping beyond the foyer. He cast the same spell Harry had and the hallway lit up in shades of silver. Robards stared at the pattern for a long moment.

“We’ll have to call in a cursebreaker,” he finally said, concurring with Harry’s private assessment. “Unless we can get the key out of one of those two,” he added softly, his gaze flicking back to Dunham and the Unspeakable for a moment.

Harry couldn’t help but think that such a complex series of spells would have been difficult to construct for someone under the Imperius curse, not to mention dangerous, though perhaps he was underestimating their abilities. He looked over at the two prisoners to find the Unspeakable glaring at him. His murderous look was quickly wiped away as though it had never been, but Harry didn’t forget it.

Robards left Beta behind to guard the manor while Delta, Alpha, the Healer, and the prisoners returned to the Ministry. Vinkelhorn was taken to St. Mungo’s after being patched up by the Healer, who then checked over Dunham and the Unspeakable, but the only thing he could confirm was that both of them were fairly healthy. He couldn’t tell them if one of them was under the Imperius curse.

“We still don’t have a spell for that, unfortunately,” he said regretfully. “And of course there’s no counter-spell.”

Robards thanked him and then sent him back to St. Mungo’s.

Dunham and the Unspeakable were thoroughly searched and then taken down to the holding cells and placed under heavy guard. The search revealed that both Dunham and the Unspeakable had wands. The Unspeakable’s was his own, but Dunham’s was apparently stolen.

Robards called Harry into his office once the prisoners were under lock and key and both teams had been debriefed.

“Sir,” Harry said, entering the office.

“Sit down.” Robards gestured at one of the chairs in front of his desk with his wand, simultaneously closing the door. Once Harry was seated, Robards cast a Muffliato.
Harry waited silently for Robards to begin.

“No option is good, you know.”

Harry didn’t pretend not to know what he was talking about.

“No, sir.”

“We can try ordering both of them to release the other from the Imperius curse, but we’d have to give them wands, and even then, unless they meant it, it wouldn’t work.”

Harry hesitated for a moment before giving voice to the thought that had been niggling inside his head since the fight at the manor. “I don’t think the Unspeakable is under the Imperius.”

Robards raised an eyebrow. “Explain.”

Harry hesitated again. “It’s just a feeling, sir. During the fight and then later in the hall, he just seemed to be too…emotional. He wasn’t acting like someone who was being told what to do.”

“That’s difficult to prove,” Robards pointed out.

“I know.” And he did. People could act absolutely normally while under the Imperius curse, right up until they were ordered to do something, but something about the way the Unspeakable had been acting didn’t sit right.

“So you believe Dunham is under the Imperius curse?”

“Maybe. But he could just be mad.”

“Perhaps.” Robards was silent for a moment before adding, “The Minister has given permission to use Veritaserum.”

Harry frowned. “Would that really accomplish anything? Aren’t Unspeakables given training to resist Veritaserum?”

“They are. But we can use it on Dunham.”

*****

After their talk, Robards had sent Harry home with a warning not to return until the next morning when they would interview Dunham with the Veritaserum.

He didn’t sleep more than a couple hours, plagued by nightmares of Draco ensnared in glowing spells that burned his skin as he tried to fight his way free. He arrived at the Ministry at seven o’clock, knowing that Robards would already be there even though it was a Sunday.

When he got to the DMLE, only a couple other Aurors from the day shift had arrived, but the light was on in Robards’ office. Stopping only to leave his cloak at his desk, Harry quickly made his way to his office.

“Come in,” Robards said when Harry knocked.

Robards looked up from the paperwork he was filling out. He took in Harry’s appearance from head to toe. Harry wasn’t sure what he saw and his face didn’t change.

“Right. Let’s go then.”
He and Robards took the lift down to the holding cells in silence. When they reached the correct floor, they stepped out into a cold hallway of dark stone. They walked through twisting halls until they reached a dead end practically bustling with people.

Six Aurors in thick robes stood guard over the two cells containing Dunham and the Unspeakable. They were separated by four cells and a silencing spell had been cast over the cells, a fact which became obvious when Harry walked over to Dunham’s cell to see him sitting in the corner, muttering to himself, though no sound emerged. The rest of the cells in the hallway were empty.

In addition to the Aurors, a serious young witch and a slightly older but equally serious wizard both in deep purple robes stood off to the side. Harry recognized them as being part of the department that monitored controlled substances, including Veritaserum. The witch was carrying a small case that nearly pulsed with protective spells.

“Birchvale, Fawley,” Robards said, nodding at the two of them.

They both nodded back, faces impassive.

Robards turned to Dunham’s cell.

Dunham hadn’t acknowledged their appearance in any way. It was entirely possible he hadn’t noticed. Robards nodded at the three Aurors standing guard. They took up offensive positions in front of the cell, one to each side and one directly in front, wands raised. The two to the sides cast a nonverbal spell simultaneously, unlocking the door.

There was a tense moment where everyone waited to see if Dunham would make a break for it, but he didn’t even look up. Robards entered with his wand drawn and Harry followed him, trailed by the purple-robed wizards. Once the four of them were inside, the door to the cell clanged shut.

The noise finally seemed to draw Dunham’s attention and he glanced up. He looked surprised to see them all standing there despite the fact that Robards was practically on top of him in the small cell.

Robards quickly restrained Dunham, though he didn’t Stun him.

The wizard in purple robes then stepped forward, pointing his wand at Dunham. Whatever he did caused Dunham to begin panting for breath and coughing. The witch darted forward with surprising speed, tipping three drops of Veritaserum onto Dunham’s tongue before stepping back. The wizard cast another spell that clamped Dunham’s mouth and nose shut. Harry could see that his nostrils were pressed closed.

Dunham made horrid sounds, his eyes rolling wildly, before they all saw his throat convulse, causing the spell to dissipate. He took in great gasps of air once he could breathe freely.

Harry didn’t particularly like their method of forcing Dunham to ingest the serum, but it was effective.

Robards immediately began questioning Dunham.

“What is your name?”

Dunham winced for a moment before choking out his reply. “Alfred Dunham.”

“What color is your hair?”

“Brown.”
“What house were you sorted into at Hogwarts?”

“Ravenclaw.”

“When did you first go to Carrow Manor?”

Harry had a brief, horrible vision of the ghosts of the Carrows standing over Draco, watching him suffer and laughing.

“Two days ago.”

“Were you accompanied by anyone?”

“Yes.”

“Who?”

“A wizard.”

“What did he look like?”

“He has black hair and brown eyes. He’s tall.”

The description described the Unspeakable fairly well.

“What is his name?”

Dunham scowled. “He never told me.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know.”

“What were you doing at Carrow Manor?”

Dunham’s eyes lit up. “Seeking the truth. Proving that my theories are correct, showing that wizards can be yet greater, that we are the superior species.”

Harry hid a grimace. That was the trouble with Veritaserum. It only made someone answer what they believed to be true.

“Did you have help?”

“The wizard. He told me that I was right, that he believed in me, in my work. He helped me find subjects. He told me they didn’t matter, that the truth was all that mattered. The truth is all that matters. He knew. He understood.”

“What did he understand?”

“He understood the value of my work! He was certain the ritual could be completed! He knew that it just needed the right subject, the right ingredients.”

“Did he tell you to do anything?”

“He told me to continue my work. He told me that I had to keep it secret, that others wouldn’t understand. They don’t. They don’t understand. He told me that if I revealed the secret I had to keep the secret.”
With that, he lunged for Robards, but the restraints around his ankles tripped him and he fell, tumbling to the stone floor. Robards took a large step backward, very nearly colliding with Harry, and pulled out his wand. Dunham started wiggling forward, still going for Robards, a blank look on his face.

“Stupefy.”

Robards nodded his thanks at Harry.

“Well, that explains a few things.”

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? Feelings? Let me know!
Wait

Chapter Summary

Surely this torture will redeem some of his sins.

Chapter Notes

Wow I did not mean for it to take this long to write this chapter! I wrote half of it and then I got a serious case of writer's block coupled with the realization that I'd written myself into a corner made of reinforced concrete. I might have been stuck there forever except my wonderful roommate/friend/fellow HP nerd came in with a sledgehammer and smashed down those walls so you have them to thank for this chapter finally getting finished! They are wonderful and only rolled their eyes like, twice, when I bitched about this chapter. Anyway....

This chapter is a little shorter than my usual chapters, but I realized that this chapter needs to end where it does so, yeah, it's just short. We will return to regularly scheduled length next chapter. As always, huge hugs and glitter for everyone who commented/bookmarked/subscribed/left kudos! Your support is what keeps me writing! For real, knowing there are people out there reading keeps me motivated to get words on the page. So this is for you all <3

Okay, this note has gone on long enough. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Draco would really, really like it if he never woke up wondering where he was ever again. At least he was alone this time. After Dunham had first kidnapped him, when Draco had woken up it had been to Dunham hovering over him with a manic grin. Alone was a marked improvement over that.

This time the room was empty and unfamiliar, but at least it had a window so that he could look around, even if it was coated in dust. Draco could tell even by a quick glance that it wasn’t the same house he’d been in before, which made sense. Whoever was pulling the strings was certainly clever enough to have a backup house for the ritual if they were clever enough to be able to kidnap three people out of a courtroom in the Department of Mysteries. Draco was fairly certain the third person was an Unspeakable, but he wasn’t sure. But they were definitely working with Dunham. Draco distinctly remembered two people casting spells at him before he was Stupefied.

Speaking of which…

Draco wiggled his fingers and toes and tried to flex the rest of his muscles, but it was difficult given the rope tying his hands and feet. He wasn’t Petrified, but it looked like Dunham had given up on what little civility he’d had before. No bed for him this time – he’d been thrown into a corner, his hands bound behind him and tied to his feet which were also tied together. His muscles were cramped painfully, but at least it was only from the uncomfortable position he’d been forced into. None of the agonizing spasms or cramps flared in his muscles that were a fun side effect of the
Cruciatus. He’d become familiar with the feeling during the war, and Dunham had made sure he wouldn’t ever forget.

*Bastard.* If he ever came face-to-face with Dunham when he had a wand…he wasn’t sure he’d be able to control himself.

Draco wasn’t sure how long he’d be left alone, or even how long it had been since he’d been kidnapped, but he knew he needed to make the most of whatever time he had. He looked around for weapons or ways to free himself but came up frustratingly short.

The room looked like it had probably been used for storage but it had been mostly cleared out at some point. The floors, despite being dusty, were of excellent quality and there were no loose nails that he could see to saw off the ropes. A few boxes were littered around, but they didn’t look promising either. He managed to scoot over to the nearest box, knocking the lid off with his shoulder, only to find it was filled with old, dusty papers. He checked all the boxes he could get to, but they had similar contents.

Draco wriggled backwards until he was leaning against the wall in the corner furthest from the door – locked, he assumed, though he couldn’t reach the knob, as well as warded – and sighed. He blew out a breath, stirring the lock of hair that had fallen into his face. He tipped his head back, staring up at the ceiling.

*Fucking hell. I can’t believe this happened again. Bloody Ministry.*

After an indeterminate amount of time spent following patterns in the wooden boards above him, it occurred to Draco that unlike the first time he’d been kidnapped, he was no longer human.

He had the strong urge to hit himself on the head. *I’m an idiot.*

Flexing his shoulders, he wondered if he could get his wings out without dislocating his shoulders with his arms bound behind his back as they were. Then he remembered. With a fierce grin, he allowed his talons to slide out.

They were one of the Veela traits he’d hated most after his transformation, a sharp reminder that he wasn’t all human and never would be again, but he couldn’t be more grateful for them now. Testing the way the ropes were tied to make sure he wouldn’t stab himself, he carefully slid a talon into the weave of the rope binding his hands and then used the razor-sharp edges to slice it apart. He had to slice apart a few more ropes before he could wiggle out of his bonds, but once he could he stretched his arms in relief. Quickly, he sliced the ropes tying his feet together and then stood up, shaking out the kinks in his muscles.

Draco looked around the room. It was small, but there was enough space. Carefully, he allowed his wings to come out. He was glad he’d worn one of his new suits, designed to accommodate for his wings, to the hearing, because he didn’t fancy standing around in a torn shirt in a drafty old house in November.

It felt good to let out his wings, like tension he didn’t know he’d been carrying was released, but it didn’t really do much to help his situation. The door was still heavily warded, and without a wand there wasn’t much he could do. His wings and his Veela magic would protect him from some Dark spells, but not all of them, and Draco would bet quite a few Galleons that Dunham or whoever was pulling the strings knew which spells he had no resistance to and had used them specifically.
Despite that knowing that, he went over to the door to see if he could pick the lock with a talon now that his hands were free, but quickly stepped back as soon as he ran a hand over the knob. He hadn’t been paying much attention before, but now he could feel the spells on the other side and the strength and malice behind them raised the hair on his arms and sent a shiver down his spine.

*Guess I’m not getting out through the door, then.*

With nothing else to do, Draco inspected every inch of the storage room he was in. While old and clearly disused, the room was solidly built and there were no cracks in the walls or floor or even the ceiling. The window was set high in the wall and although he could reach it, it was far too small for him to fit through even if he tucked his wings away. With no obvious escape routes, he searched the boxes more thoroughly to see if there was anything he could use. Unfortunately, they proved equally useless on the second search. There were no weapons or tools in any of them, and the only thing he was able to determine was that he was in the old Carrow Manor.

Draco shuddered. He’d never liked the Carrows. Growing up, he’d been forced to visit with them a few times and then he’d gotten far more acquainted with them than he’d ever wanted to be during his seventh year at Hogwarts. They’d been particularly unpleasant even before the Dark Lord’s return and downright nasty afterwards. He had no doubt that the Dark magic he could feel lingering in the walls was at least partially the reason that this building had been chosen for the ritual.

Trying to keep his mind off the war and the thought of what secrets and memories these walls might hold, Draco started pacing. There wasn’t much room, but it was better than sitting on the hard wooden floor.

Four paces, turn, four paces, turn, four paces, turn, four paces, turn, four paces, turn…

****

Draco jerked awake, talons out and wings coming over to form a feathery barrier in front of his chest out of reflex. He looked around wildly but the room was empty. He wasn’t sure how long he’d been sleeping and there was no way to tell except that it was now dark out whereas before he’d fallen asleep the window had been letting in whatever light trickled from between the thick grey clouds. His night vision, while better now that he was a Veela, still wasn’t perfect, but it was enough to see that he was still alone and the door was still closed, which was enough for him to tuck his wings back behind him and sheathe his claws.

He waited to see if he could figure out what had woken him, but after several minutes passed in complete silence, he relaxed back against the wall.

Draco sighed. While admittedly rather terrifying, being kidnapped was mostly boring. Even the first time Dunham had kidnapped him, while the periods between torture sessions were their own form of torture since he never knew when Dunham would return, Draco had had nothing to distract himself with. This time, at least, he could move around instead of being strapped to a bed, but aside from rereading the papers, he still had nothing to do.

Rather than sink into the mind-melting terror that lurked in the back of his mind, waiting for him to let down his guard, he thought about Harry and Hermione.

He knew without a doubt that they would come for him. Well, Harry would likely be the one to physically come for him since he was an Auror, but Hermione would undoubtedly be the one to figure out where he was being kept. At least, he hoped they were working together and that Harry had finally apologized to her. Somehow though, he doubted it.
The tension at his trial had been palpable and Harry had looked more guilty than upset. If Harry hadn’t apologized before the trial, he certainly wouldn’t have apologized afterwards. Hermione had looked upset as well, but beneath that Draco had glimpsed something edging on heartbreak. He could smack Harry for his stubbornness.

He wished he knew how to fix it.

A sick feeling that had nothing to do with the hunger pangs that had started a few hours ago settled in his stomach. He hated knowing that his mates were out there suffering. And both of them were, even if Harry was too stubborn to own up to his actions or admit that fighting with Hermione was painful for him too.

No small part of him was afraid that their fight would tear apart what they had before it could ever really become something. And it could be something great. If Samhain had done nothing else, it had proved that they had good chemistry. Harry and Hermione had been friends for years, and if they’d just let themselves, Draco knew they could fall happily in love. And even if he’d spent most of his formative years hating them, Draco was pretty sure he could fall in love with them too. Not that he’d tell them that anytime soon. But Draco had been raised on the belief that family mattered above all and he’d be damned if he let one fight destroy his new family.

Rather than linger on thoughts of a life empty of his mates if they couldn’t make up, he distracted himself with thoughts of what they could have. And if memories of Samhain played a small role in those thoughts, well, Draco’s thoughts belonged to him alone.

*****

Draco wasn’t sure what time it was when he heard noise in the house for the first time since waking up after falling asleep to thoughts of Harry and Hermione in…compromising positions. The wavering light from the window hadn’t changed, giving no clue to how much time had passed. Carefully, he climbed to his feet, tucking himself into the furthest corner from the door. He kept his talons and wings out and ready – if this was Dunham or the other person who’d kidnapped him, he wanted to be prepared to protect himself, and, if he was lucky, escape. When they came for him, they’d have to take down any protections they’d put up and that would be his chance.

He waited tensely for the door to open but despite all the footsteps he could hear in the distance, none approached the door. His heart was pounding so loudly he nearly confused it for more footsteps.

It wasn’t until he heard the huge crack of Apparation and interminable time later that he realized what those sounds must have been.

They found me! The Aurors had come for him!

But swiftly following that was the realization that they’d left him behind – the Aurors had come, but they hadn’t rescued him.

Maybe they didn’t want to.

For a brief, crushing moment, he wondered if this was their way of getting rid of him for good. He wouldn’t be a problem anymore if they let him starve to death in this godforsaken house in the middle of nowhere. Even though he’d been exonerated at the end of the war, there were still plenty of people – on both sides – who would like nothing better than to see him dead. Nightmares of some of those people still woke him up at night, the feel of a wand pressed to his throat lingering even after the sun had risen.
With difficulty, Draco shook himself out of those thoughts. Harry and Hermione might be fighting right now, but they’d never leave him to rot.

He clung to that belief as silence descended on the house again.

*****

When Draco woke up next, it was dark. His mouth felt dry and he was starting to feel clammy. He tried to stand but his legs were shaky and he decided it was probably better if he saved his strength.

At least the hunger pangs had stopped.

*****

At first he thought it was the sun in his eyes that had woken him up. The sky had finally cleared and the light pouring in through the dusty window was blinding after the bleak weather of the past few days.

His eyes wouldn’t focus and he was barely able to push himself into a sitting position from where he’d sunk to the floor when he’d fallen asleep. He was panting by the time he managed it and his head was swimming.

It wasn’t until he heard the noise that he realized it wasn’t the sun that had woken him.

Footsteps echoed through the house, muffled by the wooden walls. It wasn’t until they were practically on the other side of the door that he realized that they were drawing closer.

He watched with a sort of detached fascination as the knob on the door turned. The door slowly swung open and Draco automatically tensed up. He couldn’t make sense of the person in doorway; his eyesight was too blurry and all he could see was a dark figure holding a wand.

His wings came around him to protect him and then he passed out.

Chapter End Notes

Thoughts? Feelings? Let me know!
Hermione was partly grateful and partly regretful that it was Saturday. On the one hand, had it been a weekday, she would have been sorely tempted to call out sick for the first time in three years, and the first time ever when she wasn’t actually ill. On the other hand, not being at work meant she was left home alone with her thoughts. And her thoughts were decidedly dark.

She hadn’t heard anything from Robards since the previous morning when they’d found the clearing where Draco had landed, leaving her to fret and worry without answers. She’d barely made it through the work day and for the first time in a very long time she’d left at five o’clock on the dot, hoping to search through her notes on the case at home and see if she could find something that would help them rescue Draco.

She hadn’t. And she couldn’t shake the feeling that she’d utterly failed him.

Hermione spent the morning reading over her notes again and again until the letters became blurry and her eyes hurt. She didn’t look up until she heard an insistent tapping at the kitchen window. When she realized it was an owl she jumped up and ran to let it in. The owl was unfamiliar, but the seal on the letter was from the DMLE.

She tore the letter open, barely remembering to give the owl a treat after it nipped her finger.

*Granger-*

_We have found where Mr Malfoy is being held but at this time we are unable to retrieve him. We think he’s alive, although his precise state is unknown. We apprehended Dunham and the Unspeakable and they are currently being questioned._

_No, you cannot help. The best thing you can do is let us do our job._

_-Robards_
Hermione read the letter three times before setting it down. They’d found Draco. They found him!

Her joy was tempered by the fact that they hadn’t really rescued him. And that they didn’t know whether or not he was okay. She could read between the lines – however they’d found Draco, they hadn’t actually been able to see or hear him. He was probably trapped behind wards or hexes which was why they couldn’t rescue him right away. She was tempted to go in and offer her services, but she knew that the DMLE had access to proper curse breakers who would be far more skilled than she was.

She clutched the note, tracing over the letters. As grateful as she was for what little information Robards had given her, she couldn’t help but be frustrated at being kept out of the loop, even if it was protocol. And she couldn’t help being a little resentful of Harry’s position. As the lead Auror on the case, he would be kept apprised of every development and be on the front line of all movement on the case. Meanwhile she had to guess at what was happening.

And he still hadn’t written her.

At this point it was beginning to feel as though they wouldn’t even be friends by the end of this, whatever ‘this’ was. That thought was intolerable. She’d known relationships that had been ruined by moving from platonic to romantic, but she had thought her friendship with Harry was stronger than that. She was still friends with Ron, after all, and their relationship had ended quite badly.

Another thought snuck in uninvited. Would Draco even want to see her, once they’d rescued him, of course, when she’d basically abandoned him? She hadn’t exactly pushed Robards to let her stay on the case. And even though she knew he wouldn’t have let her, shouldn’t she have tried?

Would Draco want a mate who gave up that easily? Didn’t he deserve better, after all he’d been through?

Draco deserves someone who will fight for him.

And Harry would, she knew that. Harry was unerringly and unceasingly loyal to those he cared about. And she could tell that Harry cared about Draco, even if he hadn’t told her in so many words. She didn’t know if he loved him, but that didn’t really matter, because he would. She knew that in time she would too, if she were given the chance. But she couldn’t imagine that Draco would want to spend more than the bare minimum amount of time with her now, and she wouldn’t, couldn’t, blame him.

With that cheery thought to keep her company, she barely managed to choke down some tea and biscuits for dinner before going to bed.

Her dreams that night were riddled with nightmares filled with ghosts.

*****

Despite her bad dreams, she slept later than she’d meant to the following morning and was woken by the sound of the doorbell.

She sat up in bed, frowning. Who would be visiting on a Sunday morning?

If there had been news of the case, Robards would have sent an owl, and she didn’t doubt that Harry
was still working, not that he was likely to visit anyway. That left very few people. Thinking it was probably Ginny or Luna, she tugged on a robe over her pajamas that were really too skimpy for the time of year and then went to answer the door.

When she pulled it open, she immediately wished she’d looked through the peephole. And also wasn’t wearing a bathrobe.

“Mrs Malfoy,” Hermione choked out.

Narcissa Malfoy stood on her doorstep looking immaculate in pants and a blouse that looked vintage chic and were more stylish than anything Hermione had ever worn. The long dark blue pea coat she wore on top was the closest thing to a proper wizard’s rope she was wearing, but instead of looking like a wizard masquerading as a muggle, she looked like she’d stepped off the pages of a muggle fashion magazine.

“Ms Granger.” Mrs Malfoy appeared unruffled by Hermione’s appearance.

“Uh, how can I help you?” she asked, tugging the lapels of her robe closer.

“I’ve come to talk about my son.”

“Draco?”

“Yes, that son.” Mrs Malfoy blinked slowly. “May I come in?”

“Oh, yes, of course.”

Hermione stepped aside, allowing her to come in. She quickly glanced around to see if they’d attracted any attention, but it was a quiet Sunday morning, so she closed the door.

Mrs Malfoy was studying her flat politely when Hermione turned around, her face not giving away any thoughts she might have about Hermione’s nice, but rather small and cluttered, apartment.

Hermione moved into the living room, gesturing at the nicer of the two armchairs. “Won’t you sit down?”

Mrs Malfoy nodded. “Thank you.”

Hermione fidgeted for a moment before she remembered the manners her mother had drilled into her. “Can I get you anything? Tea, coffee?”

“Tea would be lovely.”

Hermione nodded quickly. “Of course.” She hurried out of the room as quickly as she could without looking like she was fleeing.

In the kitchen, she quickly set the water to boil before sneaking down the hall to her bedroom. She changed as fast as she could into a pair of jeans and a sweater, pulling her hair back into as neat a bun as she could manage without a mirror. She made it back to the kitchen just as the kettle started to whistle.

She hadn’t asked what type of tea Mrs Malfoy wanted, but she figured Earl Grey was a safe bet. She pulled down a box of the nice loose leaf tea she used when she’d had a bad day and made up a pot in the teapot Mrs Weasley had given her as a housewarming gift back when she and Ron had still been together. It wasn’t really to her taste, but unlike her normal teapot, it wasn’t chipped.
She grabbed a tray and set two cups and saucers on it along with the teapot and a small pot of sugar. She didn’t have lemon, so Mrs Malfoy would just have to manage without.

When she walked back into the living room carrying the tray, Mrs Malfoy made no mention of her change of clothes. Hermione set the tray on the coffee table.

“Sugar?” Hermione asked as she poured.

“No, thank you.”

Hermione handed over the cup and saucer which Mrs Malfoy took with perfect grace, the saucer not even clinking against the cup.

Hermione made up her own cup and then took a sip, immediately burning her tongue. *Fuck!* She bit back the curse, noting that somehow, Mrs Malfoy was sipping her equally-hot tea without any sign of discomfort.

“You, uh, mentioned Draco?” Hermione asked when the silence had stretched out far longer than was really polite.

She took another leisurely sip of tea. “I was terribly surprised when he told me that you and Mr Potter were his mates,” Mrs Malfoy finally said.

Hermione blinked. *That was unexpected.* “I’m…sorry?”

Narcissa shrugged minutely. “I worried for him. When Draco returned after being kidnapped by that horrible man as a Veela, I knew that he would have a mate. I knew he might even have two, though it’s far less common. I had hoped they would be people he knew, that he was comfortable with.”

“Which we weren’t,” Hermione finished.

Mrs Malfoy’s expression gave no indication of her thoughts on the matter. “I worried, as a mother does, about his happiness.” She took another sip of tea.

Hermione sat nervously in the silence.

“I have no interest in making Draco unhappy,” she said when it became clear Mrs Malfoy wasn’t going to continue.

She tipped her head. “It must have been quite a shock for you, as well.”

Well, that was true.

Hermione tried to remember how she’d felt when she’d learned that she was Draco’s mate. Or one of them, anyway. It was incredible to think she’d only figured it out a fortnight ago. With all that had happened since then, it seemed much longer.

She’d felt shocked, mostly, but also as though a lot of jagged pieces had suddenly slotted together to form a single, smooth picture. Draco had been part of her life for so long, even if sometimes only tangentially, that finding out that she was destined to be part of his forever had felt almost logical. And that was even more true for Harry, really. Harry and Draco had always been close, even when they’d been enemies, and their emotions had always run right beneath to the surface. *And now those emotions are just love instead of hate.*

“I suppose,” was all Hermione said in reply.
The silence stretched out again. Mrs Malfoy gazed at her unflinchingly, almost daring her to say something even though her face was so carefully bland it could have been made of stone.

“They’ve found him,” Hermione finally blurted out. She knew it was supposed to be, if not a secret then at least confidential, but she felt that Draco’s mother deserved to know.

For a moment, a smile flitted across Mrs Malfoy’s face. “That is good to hear. I trust the Ministry worked hard to recover him.”

Hermione winced. “Well, he’s not recovered exactly. They found him, but they haven’t rescued him yet.”

Mrs Malfoy took a tiny sip of tea and then set her cup down on the table. “I see.”

“I’m sure they’ll rescue him as soon as they can. I know Harry won’t rest until they do.”

“Mr Potter’s determination is commendable.”

Hermione cringed. The implication that hers was not was clear. *I should be out trying to help save him.* “Harry’s very loyal, and I know he cares about Draco.” She wasn’t sure why she was telling her such personal information, but it seemed important that Mrs Malfoy knew that they weren’t going to abandon Draco.

Mrs Malfoy hummed. “Mr Potter does tend to wear his heart upon his sleeve.”

“He does.” It was one of the qualities Hermione had always admired – the bravery it took to put yourself on display to the world. She imagined it was a quality Draco appreciated as well, especially if he’d spent his life around people as emotionally demonstrative as Narcissa Malfoy.

Mrs Malfoy must have heard something of the wistfulness in Hermione’s voice.

“Have you ever wondered, Ms Granger, why fate gave Draco two mates?”

Hermione blinked at her in surprise. “I, well, yes. A few times, I suppose.”

“Did you find an answer?”

Hermione frowned. “Well, no. There’s not really an answer to that kind of question. It’s just something that *is.* We, Harry and I, that is, we’re both just, meant for Draco.”

“And yet you do not feel equal to Mr Potter.”

Hermione stared at her.

“You feel inadequate, less desirable, less worthy.”

Hermione spluttered. “I’m not inadequate. Or unworthy.”

“Then why are you acting as though you are?”

“I don’t know.” But that was a lie. Because Mrs Malfoy was *right.* She *was* acting like she was less worthy. And it was because in many ways, she felt, as she had for most of the time she’d known Harry, like she was standing in his shadow. While she’d never been resentful the way Ron had, she’d accepted her place as being behind him, an afterthought at best. Harry had never treated her that way, but Ron had. And so had the rest of the Wizarding world. When Draco had started to do the same, she really hadn’t been surprised.
Mrs Malfoy sighed. “Ms Granger, while I try not to pry into my son’s life, even I know he has been unhappy lately because of,” she fluttered a hand, “this.”

“I didn’t mean to upset him,” she said softly.

“But you did.”

Mrs Malfoy stood, her blouse and trousers somehow entirely unwrinkled. She observed Hermione for a moment before her expression softened minutely.

“He cares for you, Ms Granger. And for all that you are not, perhaps, the mate I would have chosen, nonetheless I want nothing more than for Draco to be happy. You make him so.” She glanced away for a moment before looking back at Hermione where she still sat, a bit stunned. “I have no doubt Mr Potter will rescue him. In the meantime, I would suggest you find a way to fix what is broken, because he cannot live without you both. And, I suspect, you cannot live without each other.”

With that, she swept out of the apartment, the door closing silently in her wake.

*****

That night, Hermione sat down at her desk and penned a letter. It took her more than an hour, and she chewed one of her quills so badly it split, but when she finally sent it off shortly after midnight she felt a weight leave her chest.

Even if he didn’t write back, at least she’d tried.

*****

When she went in to work on Monday, she determinedly did not think about the case. She worked through cases and files that had built up as she worked tirelessly on Draco’s case for the past two weeks. Despite Felicity’s competence, she was not yet fully trained as a Department Head, and quite a few things were Hermione’s to deal with alone. She worked through the morning and into the afternoon before a paper airplane zipped through her door, jabbing her in the forehead before dropping to her desk.

She rubbed her head as she laid aside the papers she’d been looking over and then unfolded the message.

She recognized Robards’ handwriting immediately.

Granger-

I am pleased to inform you that late this morning, Mr Malfoy was successfully rescued. He was immediately taken to St Mungo’s for diagnosis and treatment. Visiting hours are until 6pm.

Thank you for trusting me.

-Robards

If she hadn’t been sitting, Hermione would have collapsed. As it was, she sank back into her chair, her muscles turning to jelly. She felt a few tears leak out, the tracks cold on her cheeks, as she read the letter again to make sure it was real.

She hurriedly glanced at the clock and was incredibly glad to see that she still had several hours to go see Draco. She quickly grabbed her cloak and then left her office, locking it behind her. She stopped
by Felicity’s desk as she left.

“I’m leaving for the day. I trust you can handle anything comes up. If something urgently needs my attention, send an owl.

Felicity look up at her, startled. “Everything all right?”

Hermione nodded but didn’t bother to explain. “Fine. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Alright, see you tomorrow.”

Hermione waved as she dashed out of the office. She headed to the atrium as fast as she could, glad there wasn’t a line for the Floo.

“St Mungo’s Hospital,” she said clearly, letting the green flames whisk her away.

She was thrust out into a large room with six fireplaces lining each wall. An attendant stood near the door, letting people in and checking in those who’d just arrived.

Hermione brushed the soot off her robe as she walked over.

“How can I help you today?” the attendant asked, holding a scroll. A self-writing quill hovered in the air over the parchment.

“How can I help you today?” she asked without looking up from the book she held.

“I’m here to see Draco Malfoy.”

The witch looked up at that, laying aside the book. She stared at Hermione for a moment before shaking himself. “Visitor desk is down the hall on the right.”

“Thank you.”

She walked down the hall quickly, dodging two people who appeared to be stuck together and another with snakes where his arms should be. The Visitor Desk was manned by a bored-looking witch in lime-green robes.

“How can I help you today?” she asked without looking up from the book she held.

“I’m here to see Draco Malfoy.”

The witch looked up at that, laying aside the book. She stared at Hermione for a moment before pulling over one of the many rolls of parchment littering the desk and then tapping it with her wand. “Malfoy, Draco.”

The words on the parchment seemed to rearrange themselves before they formed a neat line with a name and number.

The witch looked up. “Room 679. Take the lift to the sixth floor, it’ll be down the hall to your right.”

“Thank you.”

Hermione fidgeted as the lift slowly inched up. It stopped at the third floor to pick up an orderly in more of the hideous lime-green robes before continuing its climb. She only felt more nervous as the number slowly went up. Robards’ letter hadn’t given any indication of Draco’s condition, and she was scared of what she’d find when she went in.
What if he doesn’t want to see me? She thrust the thought away.

When the doors finally slid open on the sixth floor, she very nearly didn’t get off. Only a curious look from the orderly prompted her to exit. She turned to the right and started walking, scanning the room numbers as she went. Room 679 was halfway down the hall. The door was closed and she couldn’t hear anything on the other side.

She knocked hesitantly, but when she didn’t hear anything after several long moments, she opened the door.

The room was nice, if sparse in the way everything in hospitals was sterile. There was a window on the opposite wall letting in the afternoon light, softening the edges on the hospital bed and the potions cabinet. It wasn’t until she’d taken several steps closer that Draco’s form became clear.

His pale skin and hair barely stood out against the white sheets, especially since his skin appeared to have lost any color it had. It clung to his bones, making him look like skeleton. His cheekbones stood out in sharp relief against his sunken cheeks, his normally pink lips barely tinged with color.

She approached tentatively until she was standing at his side. From up close he looked even worse. His hair was lank and a bit greasy, while the rest of him had the harsh, almost dry look of a strong Scourgify. The covers were pulled up to his chest, tucked beneath his armpits with his arms over the sheets, folded across his stomach.

She desperately wanted to touch him, but she had no idea what he’d been through and she didn’t want to inadvertently hurt him.

“I can feel you staring.”

Hermione jumped at the sound of his voice. It was raspy and dry and she was sure she’d never heard anything sweeter come out his mouth.

“Hello, Draco, how are you?” She wanted to wince as soon as the words left her mouth. Could I be more inane? What’s next, I ask him about the weather?

Draco’s eyes finally flickered open, the bright grey undimmed. “Peachy, Granger. Never felt better, really.”

She suspected it was only meant in jest, but she cringed a bit to hear him use her surname again. “I meant, uh…” She wasn’t sure how to ask what was wrong with him without sounding terribly insensitive.

He took pity on her. “A bit malnourished, a lot dehydrated. I’ll live.” He looked her up and down. “And I thought I was the one who was ill.”

Hermione grimaced. She knew she had dark circles under her eyes, and she hadn’t eaten much the past few days. “It’s been a tough week. But that’s, uh, that’s good, that you’ll live, or that you’re good, er, well, I mean.” That was a vast understatement. The relief at seeing him alive and more or less well was staggering.

“You’re even worse with words than usual. Are you still upset about that little tiff? I had hoped Potter would have apologized by now but I’m guessing he hasn’t.”

“Apologized?” she repeated stupidly.

“That’s a definite ‘no,’ then.”
“We haven’t spoken much,” she said faintly. She wasn’t sure she was defending him or blaming him.

“That just makes him even more of a prat that I thought.” He started coughing at the end of his sentence and Hermione looked around wildly until she located a glass and a pitcher of water. She quickly poured him a cup and brought it over.

He drank it all and it seemed to help.

“Is there anything I can do?” She tried not to wave her hands too wildly, but she felt helpless standing there staring at him when he looked two steps from death.

Draco rolled his eyes. “I’m fine. The Healers already forced more potions down my throat than I thought they kept stocked in this place. They said I’ll be back to my usual self in a week.”

Whatever reply Hermione might have made was cut off by the sound of the door opening. She turned around to see Harry staring at her with the same deer-in-the-headlights look she was sure she had.

Draco scoffed from the bed. “Honestly, and I thought I was the one with communication issues.”

Harry shuffled into the room, closing the door behind him. He ran a hand through his hair, avoiding eye contact with either of them.

“I got your letter,” he finally muttered.

She wasn’t sure what to say to that. “Oh.”

“You didn’t reply?” Draco asked, scorn dripping from his words.

“I didn’t know what to say,” Harry replied stiffly.

Draco raised an eyebrow. “I thought we discussed this.”

“Well, yeah, but then all this happened,” he said, waving a hand.

“You are a right prat,” Draco informed him.

Harry blew out a breath. “I know.” He finally looked at Hermione, guilt heavy in his eyes. “I’m sorry.”

Hermione bit her lip. “Harry –”

“I’m sorry for not writing back,” he interrupted her. “And I’m sorry for shutting you out, and for getting jealous, and for being a horrible friend, and for not telling you what an amazing person you are, and that I don’t want to lose you, as a friend or as something more. And for not telling you that I love you.”

“You’ve told me that already,” Hermione said quietly.

“But I should have told you again and again. I should have made sure that you didn’t feel like I was leaving you behind, and that I value everything we have and I will for as long as you’ll have me. Right prat and all,” he added wryly.

Hermione blinked back tears for the second time that day. “I forgive you.”
Harry blew out a breath. "Thank god." He strode over and enveloped her in a hug, his warmth melting the ice that had started crystallizing around her heart. She hugged him back tightly, relishing the familiar feel of his arms.

A slow clap from the bed made them break apart. Draco was watching them with something between approval and lust.

“So Potter can learn something after all.”

Harry rolled his eyes before flushing. “I didn’t mean for any of this to happen.”

“You were an idiot,” Draco agreed. “Lucky you have two of the smartest people in Britain to sort you out.”

Harry grinned at him and then looked at Hermione, his eyes now filled with something so tender, she wasn’t sure she wanted to put a name to it.

He took her hand and then reached out to take Draco’s. “I am very lucky to have both of you.”

Hermione smiled at him. She thought things might finally be okay between them.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so I didn't remember until I was poking around on the HP wiki that apparently St Mungo's people wear lime-green robes, so I decided that in order to keep from having to go back and fix things, orderlies, nurses, etc wear the lime-green robes and Healers wear white robes on top, like how doctors wear white coats and nurses wear scrubs. Hope that makes sense!

And as always, thoughts? Feelings? Let me know!
Harry was extremely reluctant to leave Draco’s hospital room, but Robards had only given him two hours off work, and even that was pretty generous. Besides that, Draco was looking a bit pale despite all his assurances that he would be fully recovered in a few days.

As he was getting ready to leave, Hermione left for a minute to go to the loo and the second she was out the door, Draco gave him a supremely unimpressed look.

Harry shrugged uncomfortably. “What?”

“She wrote you and you didn’t write back?”

“Er, no. I meant to but I, uh, wasn’t sure what to say.”

Draco looked up and sighed heavily. “Potter, literally anything is better than nothing. The word ‘sorry’ all by itself would have been better, even in your terrible handwriting.”

“I know, but I just…I couldn’t think of what would, I don’t know, make things better, I suppose.”

“Sometimes it’s not about making things better. It’s just about making things right.”

Hermione returned before Harry could think of a response, which was just as well considering he didn’t have one.
As she took a seat in the chair on the far side of bed, Harry stood up. “I’ve got to be getting back to the Ministry. But I’ll come by tomorrow?”

“Mother’s coming to get me in the morning, actually, to take me back to the Manor while I recover. But you’re welcome to visit me there, both of you.”

“Doubtful,” Hermione muttered, her face dropping and her voice only just loud enough to be heard. Harry wasn’t entirely sure she’d even meant for them to hear.

Draco looked at her sharply. “What do you mean?”

“Nothing,” she said, voice short.

Draco didn’t look remotely convinced but he didn’t pursue it.

“I guess I’ll see you…soon, then,” Harry said. “Both of you,” he tacked on hurriedly, seeing Hermione’s too-blank face.

Hermione stood. “I should be going as well, actually. I’m sorry, Draco.”

“Of course,” Draco replied, smiling. “Don’t worry about it, Hermione.” He grabbed her hand as she walked around the bed. “But please, don’t think you’re not welcome, because you are.” He said it so low that Harry was sure the words were for her alone.

He turned away to give them a moment, but he was unable to keep from glancing at them from the corner of his eye. But all they did was share a glance and Hermione smiled so sadly that Harry knew he was worst prick in all of England.

“Goodbye, Draco,” Harry said as Hermione joined him by the door.

“See you soon, Harry, Hermione.” Draco gave him a look as they left and Harry ducked his head with guilt.

The walk to the lift was filled with excruciating silence. He knew Hermione was upset, but he wasn’t at all sure why. Everything had seemed to be going well – he’d finally apologized and she’d forgiven him – and now everything was wrong again.

When the lift doors opened and no one was inside, he was grateful. He didn’t want an audience to a disagreement between two members of the ‘Golden Trio,’ especially since it would end up splashed across the gossip pages of the *Prophet* the next morning.

Glancing over at Hermione as the lift slowly descended, Harry knew he had to fix this. Somehow he’d broken whatever they’d begun to have and he only just now realized how badly.

“Go out with me,” Harry blurted.

Hermione looked over at him in confusion. “What?”

He cleared his throat, feeling his cheeks turn pink. “Go out with me, please?”

She looked at him skeptically. “Why?”

“Because we’re…” he wasn’t sure how to finish. *What are we?*
She smiled sadly. “We’re not anything, Harry, not really. Friends, I suppose. Although my friend Harry would never have treated me the way you have.”

Harry flinched. He had been a terrible friend this past week, and longer if he were being honest. “No, he wouldn’t have. I should’ve been a better friend, let alone…anything more.”

Hermione sighed. “Maybe we’re just not meant for anything more.”

Harry frowned. He didn’t want that. He didn’t want that at all. And he should have realized earlier how important Hermione was to him. And she needs to know. “No, we just didn’t give it a real chance. And that’s my fault, because I was so focused on Draco that I didn’t give us a chance because I thought that being friends would make being more easier, but it doesn’t.” He snorted. “It really doesn’t.”

Hermione looked at him properly for the first time since leaving Draco’s room. “So you want to go out?”

Harry nodded firmly. “I do. I want to give us a proper chance.”

She smiled. It was small, barely there, but he saw it. “Alright.”

Harry grinned. “Great! Okay, I’ll owl you then, and let you know the details.”

The lift slowed then, as they approached the ground floor. Just before the doors opened, Harry leaned over and kissed her cheek. “I’m going to make this up to you, Hermione Granger. I promise.”

Hermione gave him a look just a shade shy of a smirk. “You’d better, Harry Potter.”

*****

When he got back to his flat that evening after putting in another few hours at the DMLE, he felt lighter than he had in ages. He didn’t even notice the person on his couch until they threw a book at his head.

He ducked, whipping out his wand, only to see Ginny lounging on his couch, holding another book in one hand.

“You really are the worst, Harry.”

Harry sighed. I should have seen this coming. “I know. Believe me, Gin, I know.”

Ginny pointed at him with one gold-painted nail. “See, I don’t think you do. Because you don’t realize how intolerably single-minded you can be. Which was great in bed, don’t get me wrong, but it’s less great when you’re working on a case and you don’t wash the dishes for a week.”

Harry blushed and cleared his throat. “Was I that bad?”

Ginny raised a single brow. “Worse.”

He ran a hand through his hair. “I didn’t mean to be.”

Ginny rolled her eyes. “Well obviously. You’re a good person, Harry, you don’t mean to be a prat, it just happens sometimes. But you’re trying to be in a relationship with two other people now – you, quite literally, can’t be single-minded.”

He cleared his throat. “You’ve been talking to Hermione, then?”
“That would be telling, wouldn’t it? But you see, the fact that you jumped to that conclusion means you know you’ve been a prat, which is better than before, but still a problem. It also means that you know, or you should,” she paused to give him a look, “that you’re going to need to do something pretty damn romantic to make up for how awful and pratty you’ve been.”

“I’m working on that part. Hermione and I are going to go on a date.”

“Just the two of you?” Ginny asked, narrowing her eyes.

“Well, yeah, that’s the point. And besides, Draco’s not really fit to be going anywhere right now,” he pointed out.

Ginny sighed heavily, her entire body deflating. “Harry. Darling, darling Harry. That’s exactly my point.”

Harry stared at her, before walking into the room and plopping into the armchair. “I don’t understand.”

“Look, if this is really going to be a date for the two of you, then Draco can’t be there.”

“He won’t-”

“In any way.”

He paused before shaking his head. “I don’t know what you mean,” he admitted.

“It means that you need to be focused on Hermione. Don’t talk about Draco, don’t bring up the whole clusterfuck that your relationship has become. Don’t mention the case. Don’t ask about her relationship with him. Focus on your relationship with each other.”

Oh. “I think I get it now.”

“Do you? Because it seems to me like you’re doing the same thing to her that my horrid brother did all through Hogwarts. He trusted that she’d be there when he got around to figuring out his feelings, and she was, because she loved him.” She wrinkled her nose. “Although why I will never understand.” She shrugged insolently. “But that’s not the point. The point is that you’re doing the same thing. You’re trusting that your friendship is enough to sustain your relationship, and her feelings, while you, both of you, sort things out with Draco. And that’s not fair to her.”

Harry hadn’t realized that he’d been doing that until that moment. And here I’m the one who listened to her cry all those months sixth year. He felt horribly ashamed, not least because he hadn’t realized how that must have felt for Hermione, to relive the same relationship over again. “That’s why she compared me to Ron,” he muttered.

Ginny rolled her eyes. “You really are thick. Men.”

Harry looked at her. “I don’t suppose you’d know how to get reservations at the most romantic, expensive restaurant in Diagon Alley, would you?”

She grinned slowly, reminding him eerily of the cat who’d eaten the canary. “As it happens, I do.”

*****

The next morning, Harry carefully crafted what felt like the most important letter he’d sent in years. He carefully avoided the details Ginny had provided when she’d owled him late the night before
with the reservation. He sent the owl before heading into work, smiling giddily.

His good mood was obvious to everyone, even his more oblivious coworkers, but only a few people bothered to comment on it, and those all assumed it had to do with the progress on Draco’s case. Tangentially, he supposed that was true, but he was trying very hard now to separate his relationship with Draco from his relationship with Hermione. Not because they weren’t related, but because he needed to build them up separately. He couldn’t rely on one to strengthen the other.

I really should have figured that out sooner.

While Ginny could be blunt to the point of rude, Harry had never really minded because she had a way of seeing right to the heart of things in a way he’d never been able to.

With a clearer mind, he was far more productive and less preoccupied than he’d been in weeks. Robards didn’t say anything about the change, but his silence spoke volumes.

On Wednesday, he went to Malfoy Manor to visit Draco. He Apparated outside the gates and then began the long walk up the drive. While technically he could have Apparated directly outside the front doors, it was tricky to navigate old magicks like the kind Malfoy Manor was steeped in, even if most of the general wards had been removed after the war. And besides, it was nice to be outside in the fresh country air after the stagnant smog that had encased London for the past few days. It was nearly December and the air was cold, but his robes kept him warm even as his breath created clouds of frost.

Once he reached the large front door, he knocked and the door swung open almost instantly. Harry knew it wasn’t magic but house elves. The house elf who’d opened the door took his outer robe, leaving him in jeans and a thick jumper, though it was a pleasant temperature inside the house.

“Where’s Draco?” he asked as the elf sent his robe sailing into a closet.

“Master Malfoy is resting in his room upstairs.” The subtext and you should not disturb him was louder than his deferential voice.

“Thank you,” Harry said politely.

He vaguely remembered where Draco’s room was from his last visit, though more from leaving than arriving. He did make a wrong turn on his way there, but one of the less unpleasant portraits sent him off in the correct direction.

He knocked and then went in once he heard a muffled call of “Come in.”

Draco was sitting in one of two large armchairs beside a bay window reading a book that looked far too heavy to hold comfortably for long periods of time. It was the kind of book that Hermione had loved to check out during Hogwarts.

For a moment, Harry was thrown back to memories of studying beside Hermione in front of the hearth in the Gryffindor common room. The heat of the fire and the comfort of true friendship warming him in ways he’d never dreamed of those longs years locked away in the cupboard under the stairs. He’d always done a bit more daydreaming than studying on those nights.

He shook his head to clear away the cobwebs and nodded at Draco, sticking his hands in his pockets.
“Hi Draco.”

Draco carefully marked his page before setting the tome down on a nearby table and then turning to face him. “Harry.”

Harry grasped for something to say. He hadn’t really thought beyond coming to visit. “You’re looking well,” he managed to get out. It was true, at least. Draco looked much better than he had three days ago lying in a hospital bed, though there was a tightness around his eyes that suggested he still wasn’t quite in peak form. That, and he still hadn’t gotten up from the chair.

“I’m feeling quite well, thank you. Mother has been exceedingly diligent in her care of me.”

“I’m sure. She must have been worried.”

Draco nodded. “She was.”

“Is she here?”

“She’s gone out. And now, if you would, I have no desire to keep discussing my mother or my recovery.” He waved at the armchair opposite him. “Tell me how you’ve been.”

Harry crossed the room and settled into the surprisingly comfortable chair. He glanced out the window and noted that it looked out over a garden that might have looked clean and well-kept at first glance but was beginning to show signs of neglect.

“I’ve, uh, I’ve been good. Work’s been less stressful the past couple days, as I’m sure you can imagine, which is a relief. Robards even smiled yesterday.”

“He did seem a rather dour man.”

Harry shrugged. “He’s got a lot on his shoulders.”

Draco hummed. “I suppose. And how is Hermione?”

Harry cleared his throat. “Good.”

“Oh? Did you finally remove your head from your arse and apologize?”

Harry coughed and suddenly wished he had a cup of tea. “Uh, yes.”

Draco raised an eyebrow in an expression eerily reminiscent of Ginny.

“I mean to say, we’re going out, on Friday. On a date.”

“There’s hope yet,” Draco replied dryly. “Where are you taking her?”

“Carmen.”

Both of his eyebrows went up. “How in Merlin’s name did you manage that?”

“I asked a friend. She knows people.”

Draco paused for a moment and then grinned. “I’ll have to thank Blaise.”

Harry stared for a moment before he realized what he meant. “Oh, er, yes. I suppose I hadn’t really thought about how she got the reservations but it makes sense…” he trailed off. He wasn’t sure how
he felt about Blaise being so intimately familiar with his love life, but he would probably have to get
used to it if Ginny and Blaise continued seeing each other.

Draco interrupted his train of thought. “I hope you have better dress robes than the ones you always
wear to Ministry functions.”

“I have the ones I wore for Samhain.” A beat passed and then Harry flushed red at the thought of
what they’d all gotten up to in the Manor that night. He shifted subtly in his chair, but by the satisfied
look on Draco’s face, he knew exactly what he was thinking about. I will not be made into a
teenager again from the memory of a kiss. The tightness in his trousers begged to differ.

“Attractive as those were, you really ought to own more than one suitable set of dress robes, Potter.”

Harry tried to think if he had any other robes that weren’t the robes that he used whenever he had to
go to some Ministry party and came up short. Draco may have a point. “I can go out and buy
another set,” he said finally.

Draco shook his head sadly. “Off the rack? You wound me, Harry.”

“I may not know a lot about clothes, but I’m pretty sure you can’t get bespoke robes made in two
days.”

Draco looked very satisfied. “You’re quite right.”

Harry frowned. “Then what do you suggest I do?”

Draco stood up and walked out. Harry got up halfway, wondering he was meant to follow, though
Draco hadn’t said as much. He was out the door anyway before Harry made up his mind.

He returned a few minutes later, wand out by his side and a heavy garment bag bobbing along in the
air behind him. With a flick of his wand, the bag unzipped itself, revealing a set of deep green dress
robes.

“This is what I suggest.”

*****

Harry tugged at the cuffs on the dress robes Draco had finally talked him into. He’d refused them at
first until he realized that not only was Draco right – he really did need another pair of dress robes,
and in a hurry – but there had been a hint of vulnerability in the set of his shoulders. For whatever
reason, whether it was the Veela or just Draco, he’d very much wanted Harry to have the robes.

He hadn’t been able to say no after that.

Standing in front of Hermione’s door, he tamped down the urge to keep fidgeting. The robes fit
perfectly, even if they weren’t at all something like he would have picked for himself.

Another moment passed before the door swung open. Harry almost swallowed his tongue.

Merlin’s balls.

Her hair had been tamed into big, loose curls that fell down her back. The dress she was wearing
was held up by a strap on one shoulder, the other bare, flowing into the rest of the dress. The crimson
red dress. He’d never loved his House color so much.

“Hello, Harry.”
He cleared his throat. “Hi, Hermione.”

“So, where are you taking me? You didn’t say in your letter.”

Harry grinned a bit. “I know.”

Her eyes brightened. “A surprise?”

He nodded. “The good kind, I hope.”

“Well then, let’s go.” She stepped all the way out into the hallway, closing the door gently behind her before locking it with a key she then tucked into a small purse. He felt the wards that fell into place as the lock clicked. She swung a heavy cloak around her shoulders, the wool brushing against him as it settled into place. She turned and gave him a small smile.

He took her arm and Disapparated them.

They landed a couple blocks away from Carmen, the restaurant Ginny had recommended. Harry had heard of it, though he’d never thought of going. It was the kind of restaurant that was clearly for couples, and since he’d never had anyone to take he’d always glossed over it even though it was just off Diagon Alley in one of the most fashionable lanes.

As they walked down the street, straight through Diagon Alley, they drew more than a few stares. He’d planned on that, hoped for it. He wanted to show Hermione off tonight, show her that their relationship wasn’t a secret, something he wanted to hide away, something to be ashamed of. She was one of the strongest, bravest, most brilliant women he knew. He felt very nearly ordinary compared to her, and he didn’t mind at all.

He looked over at her, walking tall with her shoulders back. *I love her.*

Hermione gave him a dry look as they walked slowly toward the restaurant. “I didn’t realize we would be the entertainment this evening,” she murmured to him, leaning in close.

He didn’t know if it was intentional, the way her breath brushed against his ear, but it sent a shudder through him anyway. He grinned at her. “At least no one is asking for an autograph.”

She huffed a laugh. “If they do, I’m going home.”

“That would be waste of a beautiful dress,” he told her, surprised at himself even as the words left his mouth.

Hermione was surprised too, if the look on her face was anything to go by. “I, um, well.” She blushed. “Wouldn’t want to waste the dress.”

Harry laid a hand over the arm she had tucked into his and he could feel the gooseflesh beneath his palm. *Well then.*

As they finally arrived at the restaurant, Hermione stopped short.

“*Carmen*?”

“It was recommended by a friend.”

“Probably the same friend who talked me into a red dress,” she muttered darkly. They shared a
commiserating look.

“I think she means well,” he said.

“I don’t think Ginny’s meant well in her entire life,” she retorted.

Harry laughed. A laugh that came from deep inside, the place that had been terrified when he realized he’d almost lost one of the best friends he’d ever had, the same place that recognized, at a base level, that he belonged to Draco and Draco belonged to him. But that instinct said the same thing about the gorgeous witch standing at his side. He didn’t think he could ever repay Ginny for helping to mend what was broken.

She’s going to be so smug.

“No, I don’t think she has.”

They made a bit of a stir when they walked inside, but the other diners quickly went back to their meals. The staff made no outward show of what they felt about standing in front of two of the Golden Trio.

“Mister Potter, this way,” the maître d’ said, gesturing with a hand.

I’ll probably never have to introduce myself ever again.

They followed him to a table that managed to be tucked away without feeling claustrophobic. It felt intimate rather than stifling – a round table in front of a half-moon booth so small that when they were both seated, their thighs touched.

After handing them each menus, the maître d’ vanished, leaving them in the dusky half-light of the restaurant, their little booth illuminated by a gas lamp in the center of the table that created an oasis of light.

“This is…cozy,” Hermione said.

“A little cozier than I anticipated,” Harry admitted.

They looked at each other and Hermione burst into a giggle she muffled behind her hand.

“I’m sorry, it’s just,” she paused to choke back another laugh, “this is such a Ginny place to send us.”

“I think Blaise is a bad influence,” he said dryly.

“I think Ginny might actually be the bad influence.”

“She probably eggs him on.”

“I wonder if they have competitions trying to think of more and more scandalous things to do.”

Harry snorted. “Probably. I think Mrs Weasley very nearly had a heart attack after their last photo in the Prophet.”

“Ginny told me she got a Howler the next morning so loud that a neighbor from three doors down came knocking wondering what all the noise was.”

“What did she say?”
She gave him a look. “Cat fight.”

They both burst into laughter they quickly tried to muffle in their napkins when a nearby couple looked over.

It was quiet for a few minutes as they both looked over their menus. Even though he’d promised himself that he was going to focus on Hermione, he couldn’t help but think of his dinner with Draco — was it only two weeks ago? Then, he’d been nervous, the air filled with the kind of tension that fills every new relationship. This, being with Hermione, didn’t have that same tension, but there was a sense of change, of being on the edge of something new. It felt…good.

After a waiter had collected their orders and brought back a bottle of the wine Hermione ordered, Harry turned to her. He almost lost his train of thought at the sight of her, gently illuminated by the gaslight. She was a vision of gold and red.

“So how’ve you been? How’s work?” he blurted when he realized he’d been staring far too long to be polite.

Hermione gave him an odd look. “I’m fine, I suppose. Better now, I think. Work has been tense. Kingsley still isn’t happy that I’m leaving.”

He blinked. Somehow in all that had happened he’d completely forgotten that Hermione was leaving the Ministry. “When’s your last day?”

Hermione fiddled with her half-empty glass of wine. “Next Friday. With Dunham in custody and the trial set for next week, there’s nothing keeping me at the Ministry. I told Kingsley I was done with the case was over, it just took longer that we were anticipating.” She grimaced. “If you can call a break-in and kidnapping a delay.”

Harry frowned. Robards was still furious that it had happened at all and the Department of Mysteries was in an uproar. For a moment, he almost told her about preparations for the trial but Ginny’s voice rang in his head and he asked instead, “Are you ready to leave?”

She took a long drink, emptying her glass. He poured her a new one.

“I think so. I did have second thoughts, there for a moment. This is the first time in years that I haven’t had my future planned out. I don’t know what I’m going to do with myself.”

“Maybe that’s good,” he suggested.

She looked at him curiously.

“I mean, you’ve had your whole future mapped out since you were thirteen years old, maybe it’ll be good for you to do something spontaneous. Do things just because you want to, whenever you want to.”

She considered that. “Maybe you’re right. Maybe I’ll go to the continent. I haven’t been to France since my parents took me the summer after third year. And I’ve never been to America, and I’ve always wanted to visit Egypt and Morocco.” She smiled thoughtfully.

“See? I think this will be really good.”

She nodded decisively. “It will be.”

She didn’t mention anything about Draco and how he might fit into that future, but Harry didn’t
either. He didn’t want her to feel like he and Draco were something she had to fit in. It should be natural, something that fell into place. Hopefully, it will be.

When their dinners arrived, the conversation lightened up. They talked about Ministry gossip, Luna’s newest venture to Finland, Lavender’s pregnancy – normal things. It felt good to set aside the heavy things, even if it was just for one night.

By the time dessert came around, they’d gone through most of a second bottle of wine and Harry couldn’t take his eyes off Hermione as she licked chocolate mousse off a small silver spoon.

“I should really send Gin a thank you note,” he murmured, staring at her.

She glanced up. “Why’s that?” She took another tiny spoonful.

“Because you look bloody gorgeous in that dress.”

She blushed, the color suffusing her cheeks and spreading lower. “You don’t look so bad yourself.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “You can thank Draco for that. He insisted that I couldn’t wear the same robes I wore on Samhain again. Probably a faux pas among the wizarding elite.”

She gave him a long look up and down. “I really should thank him.”

His mouth suddenly felt dry. He barely heard the gentle clink of silver hitting ceramic as she set down the spoon and leaned toward him.

When her lips were just a fraction of an inch away, his control vanished. He slid his arm around her waist and tugged her closer until she was nearly in his lap and pressed his lips to hers.

Her tongue peeked out to taste his lip and he returned the favor, tracing her upper lip before dipping inside. The soft moan she made almost made him forget that despite the low lighting and the quiet, they were still in public. He kissed her again before pulling away.

Her eyes were bright but her lipstick was still perfect. He brought his other hand up and used a thumb to rub at the edge. She nipped at it and he almost Apparated them away to somewhere more private. He pulled his thumb away and looked at it but none of her red lipstick stained it.

She was smirking when he met her eyes.

“Ginny knows a truly staggering amount of cosmetic charms. She thought I might need some tonight.”

He leaned in and kissed her hard. “She was right.”

Hermione ran a hand down the edge of his outer robe. “You know, I really think we should put it to the test.” She looked at him from under her lashes. “Are you ready to leave?”

He swallowed. You have no idea. “Let’s go.”

He set her to one side as looked around for the waiter who appeared almost instantly.

“Sir?”

“We’ll take the check.”

“It’s covered, sir,” he said smoothly. “By the gentleman who arranged the table.”
Harry blinked. *Right then.* “Thank you.”

The waiter vanished back into the shadows.

“I’m not sure whether to thank Blaise or punch him.”

“Both, probably,” Hermione said dryly.

He looked at her and instantly remembered why they’d been in a hurry to leave. Despite her perfect lipstick, she still looked like she’d just been kissed. He wanted to figure out what it would take to smear that lipstick.

“Shall we?”

They collected their cloaks and then stepped outside. It was fully dark and the chill in the air only reminded him how warm he felt. He took her hand.

“Ready?”

She smiled at him. A smile he hadn’t seen in weeks “Absolutely.”

The crack of Disapparation echoed down the street.

Chapter End Notes

As always, thoughts? Feelings? Let me know! (Even if I don't respond, know that I read every single comment and they all mean a lot to me!)
Gardens

Chapter Summary

Draco is finally feeling better and he's ready to set things right.

Chapter Notes

It's a week late, but it's here! I don't really want to go into a long-winded explanation but suffice to say that life is never convenient, especially when making plans. Thank you all so, so much for your support and all your lovely comments. The fact that people are still out there waiting for this story even after almost two years is just incredible. So thank you, thank you, thank you!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

“I’m fine, Mother.”

His mother paused in the middle of reaching to adjust his pillows for the fifth time and brushed a lock of hair off his forehead instead.

“Of course, darling.” She clasped her hands in front of her, the picture of pureblood elegance. “But a mother worries.”

Draco tried to smile. “Of course. But the healers did an excellent job, and I should be fully recovered in a few more days.”

“Hmm.” She smoothed his bedspread, the closest he’d ever seen her get to fidgeting. “Call if you need anything, dear.” She laid a hand briefly against his face, her fingers cold against his skin, before stepping back.

“I will.”

She nodded and then left, her robes trailing behind her elegantly.

As soon as the door clicked shut, Draco fell back against the pillows. His mother had been hovering incessantly since he’d returned from St Mungo’s the previous morning. He could hardly blame her – almost losing her son twice in three months after managing to keep him safe during the horrors of the War couldn’t have been easy.

Still, Harry’s visit later that day was a very nice change. And an even better distraction. Draco felt a deep satisfaction when Harry agreed to wear the robes he’d picked out for him. He wasn’t sure if he was disappointed or not that Harry didn’t question why Draco had a bespoke set of dress robes ready and waiting, but since it saved him the effort, and embarrassment, of explaining, he decided to be thankful.

Draco wished that Harry had tried them on at the Manor so that he could’ve seen how they looked
on him, but he would just have to settle for waiting until the next time Harry needed dress robes. Which would be soon, if Draco had anything to say about it.

On Thursday he woke up feeling very nearly back to normal. He stretched and felt all his joints pop in a very satisfying way. He got out of bed, slipped on a pair of house shoes, and then went over to the French doors leading out to the balcony. It was cold – his breath formed clouds of frost on the window as he looked outside – but he opened the door anyway.

The cold breeze quickly penetrated his silk pajamas, raising gooseflesh and making him shiver, but it felt good to be outside and breathing in fresh, crisp air. Checking his surroundings, he carefully let his wings out. Stretching them out to their fullest, he felt like he could breathe properly for the first time in weeks.

The slight breeze ruffled his feathers, casting rippling shimmers on the floor as the weak sunlight reflected off the silver. He curled one around his front and let the other fold up along his back. The heat from his wing quickly warmed him up, dispersing the chill of the late November morning.

He looked over the garden. They hadn’t yet had the first snow of the year, but rime covered the winter bones of the garden, though the sun was slowly melting it away. He frowned as he saw creeping vines where they shouldn’t be, the overgrown bushes, and the weeds that had begun creeping into his mother’s beloved rose garden. That, more than anything, told him how worried his mother had been. The last time the garden had gone untended was the awful year the Dark Lord had made the Manor his home.

Chilled in a way that had nothing to do with the temperature, he stepped back inside, closing the door firmly. He debated tucking his wings away, but he felt more…himself with them out. He’d never thought to feel that way when he’d first found out he was Veela, but the wings had become a part of him and tucking them away felt like caging part of himself.

He dressed and then went downstairs to get something to eat.

His mother was waiting in the breakfast room, sitting to the right of the head of the table reading the Prophet. A collection of dishes was laid out on the sideboard. Draco took his seat to the left of the head. They never talked about the empty seat between them.

As soon as Draco sat down, a house elf popped in to serve him. A selection of his favorite foods was set in front of him along with a phial filled with blue liquid before the house elf disappeared again.

“Good morning, Mother.”

His mother looked up, smiling politely, her eyes flicking briefly to his wings. “Good morning, Draco. How are you feeling today?”

“Much better.”

She gave him a real smile. “I’m pleased to hear that.”

The room was quiet again for a few minutes again as Draco ate while his mother read the paper and sipped her tea. Things felt almost back to normal.

Once he’d finished eating, Draco quickly down the potion the house elf had brought – the last dose of Restoration Potion the Healers had ordered. It didn’t taste particularly good, but it certainly wasn’t the worst potion he’d ever had to drink.
As Draco was standing to leave, his mother looked up.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you, you received a letter this morning.”

“From who?”

She held her hand out and a house elf popped in to hand her the letter. “The Ministry, I believe,” she replied, glancing at the seal.

She handed him the letter which did indeed have the Ministry seal.

“Thank you, Mother.”

“You’re welcome, darling.”

Draco walked out, holding the letter. He considered the thick parchment as he headed back up to his bedroom. The seal was for the DMLE, rather than the generic Ministry seal.

Once safely alone in his room, he used one talon to crack the wax. He hadn’t even noticed that his talons had come out, but he was just glad that it was in the privacy of his room rather than at the table with his mother.

Unfolding the letter, he quickly scanned the message inside.

Dear Mister Malfoy,

This is your official notice that the trial for Alfred Dunham, in which you are the prosecution, has been rescheduled for Thursday next, November 24th. The trial will be presided over by Chief Warlock Lionel Burnroot. Due to the circumstances surrounding the previous trial, your presence will not be required or requested on this date. You will need to provide testimony regarding the most recent events to the Lead Auror of the case, namely Harry James Potter, no later than Tuesday, November 22nd. Your previous testimony has been entered into the official record. You will be notified by owl when a verdict has been reached.

Percy Ignatius Weasley
Court Scribe of the Wizengamot

Ministry of Magic

Draco sat down on his bed, more relieved than he’d expected. Even though he wanted to see Dunham brought to justice personally, the thought of facing him in a courtroom yet again filled him with dread. He would never forget the terror he’d felt as the Portkey had dragged him out of the courtroom. He was very, very glad that he wouldn’t have to return.

He shook himself out of his thoughts, noting absently that his talons had punctured the parchment. He laid the letter aside and then focused until his talons receded. It took less effort than it had when he’d first practiced right after becoming Veela. That’s something, I suppose.

*****

When Bitsy popped into his room early that afternoon, he was glad of the distraction.

“Yes?”
“You is having a visitor, Master Malfoy.”

Draco tilted his head. “Who is it?”

“Mistress Granger. She is waiting in the Blue Parlor, Master.”

“Please prepare tea and have it sent to the parlor. I’ll meet her there.”

“Yes, Master,” she said before Disapparating.

Draco resisted the urge to fly down to the parlor. Aside from her brief visit to the hospital and the trial, he hadn’t seen Hermione properly in weeks. His Veela was clawing inside to see his mate, the vague feeling of unease that had permeated his body growing to a painful buzzing.

He walked so quickly through the halls and down the stairs that several of the portraits gave him disapproving looks. *Fuck them.* It had been years since he’d sought the approval of his ancestors, and he’d be damned if he waited any longer than necessary to see his mate.

When he arrived at the door to the Blue Parlor – swung partly shut – he took a moment to straighten his robes and ran a hand through his hair to make sure no strands were out of place. Satisfied, he pushed open the door.

Hermione spun around at his entrance from her position by the window.

“Oh! I didn’t expect you so soon, your house elf said you were busy.”

He swept forward. “Never too busy to see you.” He gently took her hand and kissed the back. The blush that rose in her cheeks was deeply satisfying.

“Charmer.”

He thought it might have been meant as an insult, but it lacked any heat or malice. He smirked. “I’m glad you finally noticed.”

She rolled her eyes. “Believe me, everyone noticed.”

“I don’t care about everyone else, Hermione.”

He let just a hint of what he felt come out and saw when she realized. Her lips parted and he had to resist the urge to lean in and kiss her until she knew exactly how charming he could be. Fortunately, Bitsy popped in to deliver their tea at precisely that moment, preventing him from ravaging her on his mother’s favorite chaise lounge. *Just as well.* It wasn’t exactly the impression he was going for.

“Tea?”

She breathed out. “Yes, thank you.”

He led her over the chaise, taking his seat after she’d sat down, letting his wings drape over the low back. He saw her lingering glance and resisted the urge to grin in smug satisfaction. He poured them each a cup from the delicate china teapot to keep her from seeing his expression.

“Sugar?”

“Just a splash of milk, please.”

He doctored both of their cups before handing her the one with a bit of milk.
He took a sip of his tea, watching her from the corner of his eye. She looked vaguely uncomfortably, though he couldn’t quite tell why. He didn’t think it was because of the house, since this was the same parlor they’d had tea in before, but he wasn’t sure why else she would look so… out of place.

“I’m glad you came to visit,” he said sincerely.

Hermione traced a finger over the rim of her cup. “I almost didn’t.”

He frowned. “Why?”

“After what your mother said, I wasn’t sure I’d be welcome.”

A deep sense of dread filled him. “My mother?”

She looked at him in question. “When she came to visit? She made it clear that she wasn’t, shall we say, especially fond of me.”

He had to focus to keep from accidentally breaking his teacup. “What do you mean?”

She hesitated. “She mentioned that I wasn’t…that I hadn’t done enough to help find you. And she’s right. I stepped back and let the Aurors do the work, I didn’t even try to work a different angle, or see if I could find something in Dunham’s notes or-”

“When, exactly, did she come to see you?”

“Um, right before you were rescued. A week and a half ago? Did she not tell you?”

“No, she did not.” Blast it, mother.

“Oh.”

“What did she say?”

“You mean aside from how I should have been helping more during your rescue? Well, she, uh, she mentioned…never mind.”

Draco eyed her for a moment before setting down his cup and then taking hers from her gently and setting it on the table as well. “Knowing my mother, whatever she told you – it’s not true.” He took her hands. “What did she say?”

She looked down at their hands. “She said…she said that I needed to fix the-” she pulled one hand away and waved it expressively, “mess we were in. She made it clear that it was my fault that you were unhappy because I wasn’t good enough for you.”

His wings flared and Draco fought the very real urge to go throttle his mother. As it was, the only reason his talons stayed sheathed was the knowledge that he would still holding one of Hermione’s hands. The very last thing he wanted to do was hurt her.

“Listen to me very carefully, Hermione. This mess we’re in? It is absolutely not your fault. If anyone is at fault, it’s me and Potter. We’re the ones who treated you poorly. You tried to make it work and we didn’t. Merlin, Hermione, you came to the Manor for me, a place you were tortured. If anyone isn’t worthy it’s me. I can’t believe that you can even look at me sometimes, let alone that you want to try to make things work between us.”

She looked distinctly uncomfortable. “I was at your trial, Draco. I know that you never wanted any of that.”
“That doesn’t change the fact that I didn’t do anything. That I just stood there and let it happen in front of me.”

She snatched her hand away. “And I didn’t do anything either! I should have done more to help find you.”

“So you just went home after I was kidnapped? Had a glass of wine, maybe read the paper?”

“Well, no, but—”

“You didn’t help the Aurors or do any research?”

“I mean, a bit, but—”

“And of course, Aurors always allow civilians to work on cases, especially when they have an emotional investment in the case?”

“No, not usually, but Harry worked on the case—”

“Harry is the Lead Auror on the case, of course he did. And I’m sure that if he had shown a single sign of being compromised, Robards wouldn’t have hesitated to pull him off completely, Lead Auror or not.”

She looked uncertain. “I suppose that’s true.”

Draco folded one wing around her shoulders. “You’re not an Auror, but I have no doubt that you did everything you could.”

“But it wasn’t enough.”

“Don’t be ridiculous,” he said firmly. “Just because you weren’t on the front lines doesn’t mean you didn’t help save me. You’re one of the only things that kept me sane. That’s more heroic than breaking down doors or firing off spells.”

She rolled her eyes but looked less upset than she had. “I don’t want to be hero.”

“Are you sure? I’d be happy to erect a statue of you. Maybe have a topiary shaped like you on the front lawn?” He smirked. “I could charm it to be red and gold.”

She shook her head. “You’re ridiculous.”

He shrugged one shoulder, letting the feathers brush against her. “Maybe.”

She pursed her lips. “Would you really make some poor house elf shape a hedge like me?”

“Don’t be silly.” He paused and she sighed, relieved. “That’s what magic is for.”

She hit him lightly on the arm. “You are insufferable.”

Considering she didn’t move out from beneath his wing as they finished their tea, he was fairly sure she didn’t mean it.

After they’d each had another cup of tea, chatting idly about Pax and their friends and nothing fraught, Draco suggested going for a walk.
“It’s a bit chilly, but the gardens are lovely even in winter.”

Hermione smiled. “That sounds nice.”

Her simple reply warmed him far more than the tea.

He called for a house elf to bring their cloaks and then led her to the solarium at the back of the house which had a door leading out the gardens. The house elf was waiting for them, their cloaks bobbing in midair. He helped her into hers, a heavy wool muggle jacket, before swinging his cloak around his shoulders.

Outside, it hadn’t warmed up much at all. Their breath created clouds of mist, though the frost from the morning had mostly melted away. He led her toward the winter garden, past empty, skeletal beds waiting for summer.

She gasped as they stepped inside the walled enclosure. As well as regular plants like holly and Cyclamen and Camellias, there were magical plants like Russian witch hazel and Frostflowers. The whole effect was breathtaking, even without a blanket of snow for contrast.

“I used to come here all the time when I was younger. During the holidays, the first thing I would do when I got home was come out to visit this garden.”

“It’s beautiful,” she said with feeling.

“It’s even more beautiful in the snow.”

“I can imagine.”

He led her through the garden, naming the various plants. “This is my favorite,” he said, pointing at a waist-height plant that had white leaves with delicate deep green veins. The flowers that climbed up the stem ranged in color from yellow at the bottom to fiery red at the top.

She leaned down to inspect it. “What is it? I’ve never seen it before.”

“It’s called a Snowdrake.”

She gave him a sharp look, narrowing her eyes. “It’s because of the name, isn’t it?”

He shrugged, smirking. “So quick to judge, Granger. Maybe red is my favorite color.”

She snorted. “Not bloody likely.”

He grinned. “I find myself becoming exponentially fonder of the color.”

She shook her head, but she was smiling.

They spent a few more minutes admiring the garden before heading back into the garden proper. They wandered aimlessly, down paths Draco had memorized before he’d even learned to ride a broom. When she started shivering he put a wing around her. She leaned into it and he smiled sappily.

It felt good to spend time with her. It felt right. His Veela was pleased, rumbling in satisfaction in the back of his mind, especially when he took her arm and she wrapped it around his like they’d done it a thousand times.

“Can I ask you a question?” she said abruptly as they strolled past an iced-over pond.
“Always.”

She gave him a look. “Why did you take Harry out to dinner and not me?”

_Oh_._ That wasn’t at all the question he’d been expecting her to ask. “It was a part of courting, actually.”

Hermione frowned. “Courting?” She thought for a moment. “Like the book you sent me?”

He nodded. “Exactly.”

“Oh.”

“Why did you think I did?”

She flushed, turning away. “Er, no reason.”

He pulled them to a stop. “Did you think I was ashamed of you?”

She shrugged. “A little.”

He tilted her chin up. “I’m not ashamed of you at all. Not even a little bit. I had planned to ask you to dinner as well. It was never supposed to be one-sided. Harry actually gave me the idea because he mentioned the meetings that are a traditional part of courtship. It was our first ‘meeting,’ as it were.”

“So we, the two of us, I mean, were supposed to have a ‘meeting’ as well?”

“We were.”

“Oh. Well then.”

Draco bit the inside of his cheek. It wasn’t in his nature to be particularly demonstrative, but he didn’t want Hermione to go on thinking that she somehow wasn’t _worthy_ of him. As though she could be anything but perfect in his eyes.

“Everything about this has been a bit backwards, but Hermione, you mean a great deal to me, Veela or not, and I never want you to feel unequal or unworthy.” He took a deep breath. “Normally I would request this formally through a letter, but I would be honored if you would go to dinner with me.”

She blinked up at him. “You don’t have to do this just because you think you should.”

He held her gaze. “It’s not because I think I should. It’s because I want to.”

Hermione bit her lip. “Okay.” She looked up at him. “Then I’d love to.”

He smiled, letting how much it meant to him show through. “Good. How about dinner on Sunday?”

“That would be lovely.”

He lifted her hand and kissed the back of her glove. “Thank you.” He let a bit of the Veela out and saw her cheeks flush as her other hand went up to touch her lips. He winked.

Chapter End Notes
I promise, it's happening soon! And as always, thoughts? Feelings? Let me know!
Chapter Summary

Finally.

Chapter Notes

Did you miss me? Are you ready? It's the big one guys!

Hi oh my god I'm so sorry about the long wait on this chapter! Lots has been happening IRL for me lately and this fic had to take a backseat for a while. And also this is my first time writing very lemony smut so please be kind, I did my best to make this as satisfying as possible given the 99k words of build up (wow whoops this fic was supposed to be 10 chapters!). As always, thank you to everyone who has miraculously stuck around this long and for every comment, subscription, etc. I actually do read every comment even though I am terrible about replying! Your words are really the only things keeping me writing sometimes, so this one is for you!

I won't make you wait any more. GIRD YOUR LOINS Y'ALL.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Draco’s last words from their conversation the day before repeated in Hermione’s mind as she found her footing after Apparating to Harry’s flat. She wasn’t quite sure how they’d Apparated without Splinching themselves or getting arrested, but they had and now they were standing inside Harry’s dark flat.

They stood near the Manor gates, Draco’s wing still around her shoulders, keeping away the November chill. She’d mentioned that she and Harry had a date the next evening and he’d grown pink in a way that had nothing to do with the cold air.

“Look, I don’t want to presume anything but I just want you to know that whatever happens between you and Harry is fine with me.”

“What?”

He shrugged a shoulder. “Knowing you two, you'll just end up on the sofa drinking tea, but there’s been enough miscommunication and I just thought I’d let you know. That I wouldn’t mind, that is.”

Hermione stared at him for a long moment, baffled. Slowly, his meaning sunk in and her cheeks flushed deep red.

“We’re not...we haven’t. I mean, that’s not – it’s just a date.”

Draco nodded. “Right, so you said. But just in case your ‘just a date’ gets a bit more interesting than some snogging on the doorstep, I wanted you to know that it doesn’t bother me.”
“Are you giving us permission to shag?”

“Not in so many words, but essentially, yes.”

Hermione choked. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

Staring at Harry, out of breath and, if she were honest, more turned on than she’d ever been in her whole life, all she could think was that there was nothing stopping them from finally being together.

“So…”

“Yeah.”

They stared at each other for a long moment and then Harry was pushing her up against the closed door and his mouth was on hers. She gasped and he slipped his tongue inside, tracing the roof of her mouth and sending shivers down her spine. In her heels they were very nearly the same height and she gripped his shoulders, feeling the strength there. She slid one hand up into the hair at the nape of his neck, tugging lightly and digging her nails in. He responded by pressing her harder against the door and reaching down to hitch one of her legs up around his hip. She could feel his cock where they were pressed together and it made her gasp into his mouth.

He pulled away for a moment, letting her get in a shuddering breath, before he started kissing down her neck. He bit lightly on the curve of her shoulder before sucking what was sure to be an impressive mark into her neck. She gripped his bicep with the hand not tangled in his hair, only barely realizing that they were both still fully clothed, cloaks and all.

She pushed the cloak off his shoulders and then managed to get both of her hands between them to undo the clasp holding it together, letting it drop to the floor. Not for the first time, she was annoyed by wizard fashion when her hands encountered his robe instead of his shirt, or, better, skin.

“Good idea,” he murmured, his lips brushing against her skin. He started undoing the buttons on her cloak, letting her leg drop back down to the floor. She stood on shaky legs as they undressed each other. Once her cloak was off, she was left in her dress and heels, so she focused on getting his robe off and then started unbuttoning his shirt. She kept getting distracted by his hands as they traced over her hips and then lower to her arse but she managed to get it undone.

She ran her hands up his bare chest when she finally pushed his shirt off, feeling the lean muscles ripple. She heard him take a shaky breath and she looked up at him. He was staring down at her with something like awe mixed with a healthy amount of lust.

He lifted a hand to cup her jaw gently. “Hermione,” he breathed. It seemed for a moment like he might say something more but he leaned down and kissed her instead.

It was different kissing him now, with so little between them. Even though the night had flown by, it felt like they’d been heading toward this moment for weeks. She moaned into his mouth as he ran a hand up her thigh deliberately, catching the silk of her dress on the way up until he was cupping her arse with one hand and her dress was bunched up to her hips.

Harry groaned as he slipped his hand between her legs.

“Of course you’re wearing lace knickers.”

She giggled and then moaned as his hand slid up and a finger pressed against her slit. She spared a moment to wonder if she was, perhaps, too ready, and then decided there was no such thing.
Her breath caught as two fingers started moving over her clit. “Harry.”

“God, Hermione.” He sounded almost awed and then he was pressing against her even harder – everywhere, from his fingers to his hips to his mouth – as he kissed her with bruising intensity.

She trembled as she kissed him back, the movements of his fingers sending lightning skittering up her spine. The friction of the lace against her clit was better than she could have imagined when she’d slipped them on while getting ready. She’d thought they might make her more ready, more prepared to face the evening. She had not anticipated quite how much.

Her hips jerked, chasing his fingers when he drew back for a moment but she groaned in approval when they returned a moment later, this time accompanied by one finger sliding lower to press against her slit through her knickers. He teased her for a long moment before his finger slipped inside her knickers, pressing against her gently for a moment before pushing inside.

“Oh.”

“Okay?”

Hermione nodded shakily. “Yes, please, Harry.”

He started thrusting his finger, using the others to rub against her clit until she was writhing against him, chasing the tight, jittery feeling building up in her chest. She was caught off guard by her orgasm, gasping his name as the high crashed over her. It had been so long since she’d had one with another person that she’d forgotten what it felt like not to know exactly when it would happen.

“God, Hermione.” He sounded almost as wrecked as she felt as he pulled his hand away, her knickers snapping gently back into place.

He didn’t pull away, instead, he lifted the hand that he’d used to bring her off up to his mouth, licking off his fingers. The other hand still cupped her arse. He shifted his grip slightly and then suddenly he was swinging her up into his arms.

“Harry!” She wrapped her arms around his neck by instinct.

He grinned at her as he started walking. “Sorry, love.”

Hermione smiled softly at him. She knew she probably looked sappy, but she couldn’t bring herself to mind, not when she liked hearing him call her that so much.

She’d almost forgotten where they were headed – where they’d been heading all night – until he set her down gently on the bed. She propped herself up on her elbows, looking at him as he stood at the end of the bed, watching her.

“Hi,” she breathed.

He grinned crookedly. “Hi.”

Belatedly, she realized that they were still partially clothed. Her dress had slid back down, leaving her mostly covered, though she was distinctly mussed. Harry was down to his trousers, which were clearly showing that he was as affected as she was.

With the bravado that had been trained into her by six years in Gryffindor, she sat up so that she could reach behind her and start pulling down the zipper of her dress. By the time it was fully unzipped, the neckline had started to dip, though it still clung to her shoulders. She bit her lip, staring
at Harry, who was looking at her with eyes gone dark. Slowly, she pushed down the straps, slipping her arms out. Her bra was a deep navy blue lacy thing that had mysteriously appeared in her bureau a couple weeks before, no doubt a gift from Ginny, which matched the lace knickers Harry had seemed to like.

When she started trying to wriggle out of the skirt of the dress, Harry finally stepped forward, not content to watch anymore. “Let me.” Gently, he pressed on her shoulders until she was lying flat on the bed.

Without conscious thought, her hands came up to flatten against his chest, feeling the muscles there. She shivered when he slowly ran his hands down from her shoulders to her chest. A brief look of nervousness crossed his face before his hands cupped her breasts through the satin and lace. They were still staring at each other, but he finally broke their eye contact to look down at what his hands were doing.

His thumbs ran along the edges of the bra, tracing the tops of the cups. She couldn’t help the soft sigh that turned into a gasp when one of his hands dipped inside to rub against her nipple. Between that and earlier, she was beginning to appreciate just how talented his hands were.

Before she had time to relax into the feeling, he was moving down. He gently tugged her dress over her hips and then off, letting it puddle on the floor, leaving her in her underwear and heels. He slid his hands up her legs, coming to rest on her thighs. He leaned down and she thought he was going to kiss her but instead he kissed just above her knickers. Her legs twitched beneath where his hands rested.

He glanced up at her from beneath his eyelashes, a look she hadn’t realized would do quite so much for her.

“Harry.”

“Yes?”

She moved restlessly. “Do something!”

He smirked up at her in a look he must have picked up from Draco. “I’m getting there.”

“Get there faster!”

“Right, then.”

In a move that had her moaning, he ripped her knickers down her legs and unfastened her bra before she even had a moment to register what he’d done. It was the cold air on her nipples that shocked her back into the moment.

She took in his pleased expression and rolled her eyes, settling back onto the mattress. “You’re insufferable.” But her voice caught as he set his hands on her waist.

He stared down at her with a serious expression. “You’re beautiful,” he said softly.

She smiled softly. “You’re not too bad yourself.” She took him and then couldn’t help laughing when she realized he was still wearing trousers. “If a bit overdressed for the occasion.”

Harry frowned, glancing down, and then blushed. “Oh.” The blush grew deeper as he quickly toed off his shoes and socks before undoing his trousers and shucking them, leaving him in just his boxers. He hesitated a moment before pushing them down as well, leaving them both completely
bare.

Hermione fought off the insane urge to giggle as he stood there at the end of the bed, a look of indecision on his face. Deciding that this was one of the times that bravery was the only way forward, she scooted forward a bit and then hooked one foot around the back of his leg and pulled, bringing him tumbling onto the bed. He barely caught himself from crashing down on top of her.

He looked at her, incredulous. She grinned up at him cheekily. “You were thinking too much.”

“Well that’s something, coming from you.”

She stuck her tongue out at him in a fit of petulance, which he apparently took as an invitation, leaning down and capturing her mouth. This brought their bare skin into contact and she shivered at the feeling.

He smiled against her lips. “Cold?”

She nipped his lower lip. “No.” Though admittedly, it was a little chilly in his flat. “Maybe.”

Harry lifted himself a bit, the muscles in his arms flexing in a distracting way. “Let’s see if we can fix that.”

He stood up from the bed and then motioned for her to move up towards the headboard. As she did, she noticed she still had her heels on. She blushed and then kicked them off, pushing them off the bed. She saw him grinning. “Oh hush. We got sidetracked.”

“I didn’t say anything!”

“Mnhm.”

He laughed as he tugged on the comforter until it was gathered at the end of the bed. Hermione ran her hand over the sheets, noting the crisp, smooth feeling. “Are these new?”

Harry’s cheeks turned a very fetching shade of red. “Er, yes. I uh, not that I was assuming anything. But, you know, just in case.” He ran a hand through his hair, ruffling the already-mussed locks.

“I like them,” she said, smiling at him.

“Yeah?”

She ran a hand over the deep red sheets again. “Yes. They’ll drive Draco batty, though.”

Harry snorted, walking around the side of the bed and then sitting on the edge of the mattress. “Well he’s a prat anyway.”

Hermione couldn’t stop herself from blushing as she thought of Draco. “He actually gave me, us actually, his, uh, his blessing.”

Harry frowned at her. “His blessing?”

She couldn’t meet his eyes, aware her cheeks were bright red. “To...consummate the relationship, as it were. Oh Merlin, that sounds even worse saying it aloud.”

A choked sound from Harry made her glance at him sharply, worried he might be upset, but she relaxed when she realized he was trying not to laugh.
“Yes, well, he thought we’d probably just end up drinking tea on the sofa like a proper old married couple.” She sniffed. “He’d be shocked if he could see us in such a state. Naked as the day.”

That was too much and Harry couldn’t contain himself anymore, laughing so hard his head was nearly in his lap as he bent over.

“He actually gave us permission to shag?” Harry asked when he’d gotten his breath back.

Hermione nodded, grinning. “He really did.”

“Well, I’d hate to let that go to waste.”

With no more warning than that, Harry leaned over her, one hand on the headboard for balance. With his other hand he cupped her jaw gently and then leaned down to give her a soft kiss that quickly escalated.

As he deepened the kiss, he moved until he was half-kneeling on the mattress beside her, one foot still on the ground. Hesitantly, Hermione moved her knees apart, letting him shift until he was between her legs, her knees on either side of his hips.

Hermione could barely catch her breath, heat spreading outward from everywhere they were touching. His kiss moved to the side of her neck and then to her chest. He scooted down the bed until his face was between her legs, his hands on her thighs. He looked up the length of her body until he met her gaze.

“Can I?”

She nodded shakily. “Yes.”

He didn’t hesitate any more than that, settling in immediately. The first touch of his tongue to his clit had her jerking, but he just shifted his grip until he had one arm over her hips, keeping her in place.

His tongue moved in circles over her clit as he used his other hand to gently stroke her slit. He pressed gently until one finger slid inside.

“Oh, yes, Harry, please,” she gasped. Her hands came down of their own volition to tangle in his messy hair.

She couldn’t keep her eyes open any longer as he kept teasing her with his tongue and fingers, another joining the first inside her, thrusting gently in counterpoint to his attention on her clit. He kept up his actions for a while – she wasn’t sure how long – as heat gathered along her nerves. Her breath grew ragged until suddenly the world went white. Her orgasm wasn’t as unexpected as the first one had been, but it still took her breath away.

He retreated once she’d come back down, gently slipping his fingers out. She looked at him, her eyesight still a bit bleary. She reached out a hand. He took the invitation, moving up her body until they were face to face. She could feel his cock pressed against her hip, hard and hot.

“Okay?” he asked, stroking her hair back from her face.

“More than.” She placed a hand against his chest, feeling his heart race beneath her palm. “I want you, Harry.”

“Are you sure?” he asked, his voice strained.
She slid her hand down his chest until she could wrap her hand around his cock. He breathed in sharply. She raised an eyebrow. “Very.”

With her help, he lined himself up but paused at the last moment. “Are you, I mean, do I need protection?”

“I take the potion,” she assured him.

“Okay.” And then he was sliding in.

She was glad that she was relaxed and that she was already quite wet. It was a tight fit and she gasped as he pushed in further. Everything was more sensitive, more intense. He paused.

“Are you alright?”

The overwhelming pressure abated after a moment and she was left with only pleasure. “Absolutely.”

He nodded and then thrust forward until he was completely seated inside her. She bit her lip at how good it felt, feeling him so deep. He met her eyes and she could only stare back, overwhelmed. Whatever he saw reassured him, because he pulled out almost all the way before pushing back in slowly, again and again until her nerves were sparking.

She hooked a leg over his hip and he got the hint, picking up his pace until she had to put up a hand to keep from being pushed into the headboard. The pressure against her clit made her breath catch with every thrust. She could feel herself getting closer, the feeling like lightning simmering beneath her skin. He must have sensed something because he slid one hand between their bodies and got a finger on her clit.

Her back bowed as she came, gasping his name. He groaned as he kept thrusting for another minute before he pressed hard against her, every muscle tense.

“Hermione,” he said, his voice rough.

He held himself off her for a moment, leaning down to kiss her. They looked at each other for a moment before he rolled off to lie beside her.

Hermione lay there for a moment before the feeling between her legs prompted her up and into the bathroom. She cleaned up and used the toilet. As she washed her hands, she looked at herself in the mirror. Bright red marks dotted her neck and shoulders, and there were small bruises already starting to darken on her hips and thighs. She brushed a finger over a particularly lurid hickey, smiling slightly.

She quickly dried her hands and then debated doing something about her now wildly bushy hair before deciding that nothing short of a long shower would help.

When she walked back into the bedroom, Harry was sitting up and the comforter was pulled up, pooling around his hips. He grinned at her.

“Hi.”

She grinned back. “Hi.”

He patted the spot beside him, and she walked over and climbed into bed. They shifted around until they were lying down, her head on his chest and his arm around her.
She fell asleep with a warmth in her chest she hadn’t felt in a long time.

Chapter End Notes

If you're curious, I listened to "There's No Way" by Lauv ft Julia Michaels a lot while writing this, if you're looking for a mood. It's a little on the bittersweet side, but it reminds me a lot of Harry and Hermione.
Harry was a little surprised to wake up before Hermione the next morning, but he happily took the opportunity to trace over the familiar lines of her face in the grey light leaking through the curtains.

He wasn’t sure he’d ever felt this way before. He loved her, more than he’d ever thought he could love anyone. When he thought back to those early feelings he’d had for Cho, which had felt so all-consuming at the time, they seemed shallow in comparison. Even Ginny – he’d loved her, had cared for her enough to try again after the war, but it had eventually become clear that they were much better as friends.

But he felt almost the same way about Draco. Well, it wasn’t quite the same, really. Being with Hermione felt like coming home, the way he used to feel about being at Hogwarts, like he’d found someplace he could really call home. Being with Draco felt like being on a broom, that sense of rightness mixed with danger and exhilaration. He didn’t want to live without either feeling. And hopefully I won’t have to.

He looked back down at Hermione, her face relaxed in sleep in a way it rarely was when she was awake, her mind always moving so quickly.

As quietly as possible, he climbed out of bed, waiting a moment to make sure she stayed asleep before pulling on a pair of shorts and slipping out of the room.

He headed to the kitchen and then, after casting Muffliato, set about making breakfast. He was just finishing up frying the bacon when he felt his spell pop.

Hermione leaned against the doorway, wearing a shirt she must have nicked from him. He almost dropped the spatula he was holding. Merlin’s balls.

He cleared his throat. “Morning, Hermione.”

She grinned at him. “Morning, Harry. Smells good.”
For a long moment he was tempted to say forget the breakfast and take her back to the bedroom and stay there the rest of the day.

“Thanks,” he said instead. “It’ll be ready in a minute. There’s tea, if you’d like it.” He nodded his head at the kettle.

Hermione came in and then sidled right up next to him to get to the cupboard. She had to reach up to find a clean one and he had to look away from the very tempting sight of her mostly bare legs before he forgot what he was doing and burned the bacon.

He could hear her making a cuppa as he took the bacon off the stove and finished laying out the food. They settled down at the table together once everything was ready. Harry didn’t realize how hungry he was until he started eating. He dug in, making sure to leave enough that Hermione would have plenty.

They ate quietly for a few minutes before Hermione paused after a sip of tea. “This is really great, but I thought you hated cooking?”

Harry hesitated. Thoughts of mornings with the Dursleys, waking up hungry and cooking meals he didn’t always get to eat, watching Dudley stuff his face while he waited for whatever was leftover – usually not much – flashed through his mind. He almost never cooked now. There was a reason he had a drawer full of takeaway menus. “I don’t, not really. But I wanted to cook for you.” He smiled at her. It was true. He’d felt happy cooking for her. Those dark memories hadn’t crept in at all.

She smiled softly back at him. “Thank you, it really is wonderful.”

They finished eating and then Hermione insisted on helping with the dishes.

“You cooked, I clean, that’s how it works!”

Harry snorted. “Try telling Ron that.”

“As I recall, I did,” Hermione said dryly. “More than once.”

He shook his head. “He hated that. Complained about it constantly whenever we went to the pub.” He put away the dish he’d been drying. “Did you ever think, back then, that we’d end up here?”

“Here?” Hermione said thoughtfully, scrubbing at a pan. “Did I think that I’d be dating my best friend while being courted by the boy who spent all of our school years tormenting me? I would have to say no.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Very funny.”

“But I also didn’t think I’d be in love with my best friend, or that the boy who tormented me would turn out to be a decent, maybe even good man.” She paused. “Or that he’d turn out to be a Veela and we’d turn out to be his mates.”

“Bit of a shock,” Harry agreed.

They finished washing the dishes in silence, Hermione staring off into space.

“Hey, you okay?” he asked, when she began slowly wiping her hands with a dish towel, her mind clearly elsewhere.

She glanced up, blinking. “Fine.”
He gently took the towel from her hands. “You’re not fine. What’re you thinking about?”

She walked over to the table, picking up her now-cold cup of tea. He was pretty sure she was just delaying trying to answer.

“We never talked about it,” she finally said, her back to him.

“About what?”

“About you shutting me out,” she replied quietly, setting down the teacup. “And why you reacted so badly and all the rest. I don’t know what went wrong, not really. And I don’t want to live with an axe over my head waiting for it to happen again if I say something wrong.”

If Harry had ever felt like a prat, it was at that moment. He felt like the scum of the earth. “It wasn’t you. I was horrible. I got jealous and irrational and –”


Harry ran a hand through his hair. “I don’t know. It’s, I just felt vulnerable, I guess. I felt like I just wanted it to be special, private. Something just between me and Draco. And I know that wasn’t fair to you, keeping secrets and lashing out. You’d done nothing wrong. You were just trying to be my friend. My best friend.”

“Yes, your friend,” she echoed. “Is that how you’re always going to think of me? As a friend first and a lover second?”

“You are my friend,” he said, baffled.

“I am. And I always will be. But you think of Draco as a lover, a partner, first. Can you think of me that way? Or will you wake up one day and realize that we’re ‘just friends?’ That what we have is just a spark, easily kindled but easily snuffed too.”

“Why can’t you be both? Good lord, Hermione, we slept together last night!”

“Friends sleep together all the time,” she said. “It doesn’t mean they last when they try to make it work.”

_She’s talking about Ron again._ And it finally hit him. She was talking about him, yes, but she was also speaking from experience. She’d already been snuffed out once.

He took the two steps to stand in front of her, reaching out to take her too-cold hands. “I’m not going to get tired of you. I’m not going to wake up one day and wish that you weren’t beside me. I love you, Hermione. I love you more than I’ve ever loved anyone, including Draco. Maybe one day I’ll love him as much as I love you, but never more. And I know I probably can’t convince you, not yet. But I’m _staying_, Hermione. I’ll do whatever you want to prove it to you.”

She looked down at their joined hands. “You don’t have to prove anything, Harry. I just don’t want you to have any regrets. I want you to be happy. Draco too.”

“You make me happy.”

She smiled wanly up at him. “It seems like we’ve mostly made each other miserable since we started being more than friends.”

“Maybe,” he acknowledged, thinking of the agony of the past month. “But that was my fault, not
yours. You didn’t do anything wrong. And I’m going to make it up to you. Every day for the rest of
our lives.”

“We are wizards, Harry. That’s a long time.” But her eyes were smiling.

“Well I want forever with you, but I’ll settle for a lifetime.”

*****

Hermione went home shortly before lunch. She’d still seemed subdued, especially compared to the
giddiness that had overtaken them both the night before, but she’d kissed him goodbye and promised
to meet him for lunch on Monday, as they used to.

The moment she vanished into the Floo, he grabbed some parchment and wrote her a note, sending it
off with his owl. Hopefully she would get it not too long after she got home. He’d meant it when he
said he was going to make it up to her.

On Sunday morning, he sent her a posy of flowers. He knew she was seeing Draco that night, but he
wanted her to know that he was still thinking of her. He had a plan to make up for how much a prat
he’d been and show her how he felt. And he also knew that he needed to make up for never
responding to her letter. And I will.

*****

Work passed achingly slowly on Monday morning, despite how much he had to do. The last-minute
details for the trial needed to be arranged, and he still had his other, regular cases to work on as well.
By the time lunchtime came, he was more than ready to get out of his office.

He made his way eagerly up to Hermione’s office, taking a moment outside her door to try and
neaten his hair, even though he knew it was a lost cause. He could see her assistant, Felicity, eyeing
him from her desk and flushed.

He knocked on the door.

“Come in!”

He entered, swinging the door closed behind him. “Hi, Hermione.”

She smiled brightly. “Harry! I’m just finishing up these papers and then I’ll be ready.”

“No problem.” He leaned against the door jamb, trying to imitate that negligent slouch that Draco
seemed to have mastered, but he was pretty sure he just looked like he was tired. He’d never been so
self-conscious about the positioning of his arms.

He watched as she quickly went through the stack of papers on her desk, signing a few and putting
the others into a file.

“Ready!” She stood, grabbed her cloak off the hook on the wall, and then swung it around her
shoulders.

Harry straightened up, blocking the door. Before she could reach for the knob, he leaned in to give
her a kiss. He could tell he’d surprised her, but she quickly sank into it, her eyes sliding shut. He slid
one arm around her waist, pulling her up against him. He traced her lower lip with his tongue but
didn’t push further when her mouth parted beneath his. He pulled back, pressing a kiss to the corner
of her mouth, before straightening up.
He smiled at her softly. *I love her.* “Now I’m ready, too.”

She blushed and he felt quite proud of himself.

They didn’t attract much more attention than they usually did on their walk to their favorite café, though Harry waited until they were outside the Ministry before taking Hermione’s hand. She gave him a look as he did, but she didn’t try to pull away. If she asked, he could always blame it on the chilly weather.

They placed their orders at the counter before finding seats at a table tucked away in a corner.

“Busy morning?” Harry asked, taking off his cloak.

“Very,” Hermione replied, slipping off her cloak as well. As she turned to drape it over the back of the chair, Harry noticed the marks on her neck just below the collar of her shirt.

He flushed thinking of how she could have gotten marks there. “What are you working on?”

Hermione sighed, leaning back. “The usual, although more than that as well. I sent off the updated case file to Robards this morning for the trial on Thursday. And then I’ve got loads left to do before the end of the week.”

He noted the way her voice changed. “The end of the week? Is that…is that it? Your last day?”

Hermione nodded. “I’ll be confirming with Kingsley this afternoon, but it was always the plan to leave after the case was finished. And now, more than ever, I think it’s the right move.”

He wanted to ask what exactly she meant, but wasn’t sure how to without sounding like he thought it was because of him and Draco – that her whole life revolved around them.

“Have you given any thought to after? I know it’s been a bit mad lately.” He wanted to roll his eyes at his own wording.

She snorted. “You could say that.” She hesitated. “Do you remember how Draco was looking for a liaison? For his company?”

He frowned thoughtfully. “Vaguely. Are you considering doing that?”

“Maybe. Draco brought it up last night, and it does sound interesting. He said the position is mine if I want it, but I don’t know if I feel comfortable with that right now.”

Harry cleared his throat. “How was it? Your, uh, your date last night?”

Hermione looked down, smiling softly. “It was good.”

He resisted the urge to make a comment on how good it must have been by the state of her neck. *Do not ask if they shagged. It is not your business.* “I’m glad.”

“He seems better, but I know he’s looking forward to the trial being over.”

“I think we all are,” Harry said. “And if Dunham doesn’t get sent to Azkaban, I’ll eat my cloak.”
Harry walked her back to her office after lunch and kissed her, on the mouth, in front of her whole office. Not that there were that many people paying attention, but it was the principle of the thing. Hermione gave him a small smile. They didn’t make plans to have lunch again because they both had busy weeks, but Harry knew they’d see each other again soon.

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Draco owled him late that afternoon to say that he was available to come in the next morning to provide his testimony for the trial. Harry couldn’t help but wonder, even as he sent off a reply scheduling their meeting for ten o’clock, if he was so late in owling because Hermione had stayed over. Although Hermione was at work this morning. He couldn’t help but imagine Draco lounging in bed, shirtless, the sheets pooled around his waist. His hair would be tousled, like it had been on Samhain…

He pulled back, forcing himself out of what would have been a very inappropriate daydream to have in the workplace.

Harry had felt very strange about it, but he’d sent a note along with the flowers to Hermione on Sunday morning, saying that he, too, was okay if she and Draco did more than drink tea on the sofa or snog on the doorstep. It felt exceedingly odd to give his girlfriend permission to shag another bloke, even if they were both dating that bloke, but it felt even stranger because it felt wrong implying that Hermione needed his permission to do anything. And strangest of all, he really wasn’t much bothered by the idea of Hermione and Draco shagging. A tad jealous, maybe, but if anything, he wished he could be there with them.

He went to sleep that night dreaming of wings and chestnut curls.

Harry felt distracted all morning on Tuesday. He’d woken at dawn with an erection that wouldn’t go away, and then when he’d finally managed to fall asleep again after taking care of it, he’d overslept his wand alarm.

He was five minutes late coming into the office, though fortunately Robards didn’t notice. He worked on finished up some paperwork and looked up at the clock on the wall to realize Draco was set to arrive in five minutes. He tried desperately to straighten up his office and neaten his robes before Draco arrived. He was running his fingers through his hair, trying to flatten it down, when there was a knock on his door.

Why did he have to pick today to be so bloody punctual? “Come in!”

Harry almost swallowed his tongue when the door opened.

Draco walked in looking the picture of a wizarding aristocrat. His fine blonde hair was elegantly tousled, his dark blue robes hung in perfect folds, and his black shoes shined so much they were practically mirrors. Somehow, the silver wings tucked against his back, the upper curves arching over his shoulders, only added to the effect.

“Good morning, Auror Potter.”

“Morning. Have a seat,” Harry managed to say, sounding only slightly strangled. He gestured to the chair in front of his desk, taking his own seat.

Draco swept his robes up and perched on the chair, crossing one leg over the other as he leaned back. “How are you this morning?”
“I’m well, thank you.” He was pleased that his voice sounded normal again. “How are you?”

Draco smirked. “Feeling quite well, thank you.”

Harry cleared his throat. He tried desperately not to think about why he looked so damned pleased with himself. *Don’t think about it. Don’t bloody think about it.* He failed. “That’s, uh, that’s good.”

“Yes, it is,” he said in a voice dripping with insinuation.

Harry cleared his throat again. “Right, well. Thank you for coming in today,” he said, trying to bring some formality back to the conversation.

“You’re welcome.”

Harry gave him a look. “So today you’ll be giving your statement about what happened during the hearing last Monday, 14 November, and what transpired afterwards.”

Draco straightened, his levity falling away. “Right.”

He felt inordinately saddened by the loss of the smirk he normally found annoying.

“Just start with the trial,” Harry said when Draco seemed at a loss for words. He picked up his Quick Quotes quill – specially modified by the department for note-taking during interviews – and set it on the parchment he’d already laid out.

Draco took a deep breath and then began. “During the trial, when Hermione was testifying, I saw the Unspeakable come up and I thought he was coming up to deal with Dunham since he’d been acting up. I felt him touch my shoulder and then I saw that he was also touching Dunham but I couldn’t do anything to stop what was happening. The Portkey – I don’t know what it was, but I assume that the Unspeakable was carrying it – took us to a clearing.”

“Did Dunham know about the Portkey?”

“I believe so. He didn’t seem surprised, anyway, because both of them cast spells at me as soon as we landed. I don’t know who cast which spell, but I know one of them was Stupefy because it knocked me unconscious. When I woke up, I was tied up in a storage room – the one you found me in.”

Harry pushed down the anger that rose up at the thought of Draco being bound and helpless. “You weren’t tied up when we found you. How did you get out of the ropes?”

Draco smirked, though it was more subdued. He held up a hand and after a moment, his fingers were suddenly tipped in sharp nails. Harry blinked in surprise. Without thinking, he leaned forward, reaching out to touch.

Draco pulled his hand back. “They’re very sharp.”

Harry pulled back, a bit embarrassed. “I’m sure. So you used your…claws to cut the ropes?”

“Talons, but yes.”

“Okay. Then what?”

Draco gave a brief but detailed account of the three days he spent waiting in the small storage room in the Carrow Manor until Harry and the Aurors rescued him. Beneath Draco’s blasé attitude, Harry could hear the lingering fear and disquiet, and despite his mostly-restored appearance, there were still
dark circles beneath his eyes.

Harry’s own heart started beating too fast, as though he were trapped in that room, feeling the walls close in. With a jolt, seeing Draco’s pale skin grow pallid, Harry realized that he was experiencing what Draco was feeling.

“Draco, are you alright?”

Draco’s face pulled into a grim smile. “Fine.”

Harry frowned, remembering Hermione saying the same thing. “You’re not.” He stood up and came around to the front of the desk. He gently took one of Draco’s hands, ice-cold and clammy. “I’m sorry to have to dredge things up. I wish none of this had happened and we’d been able to properly protect you. I wish you’d never been kidnapped in the first place.”

Draco looked at their hands. “I did get something out of it, I suppose.”

“Oh?”

Draco looked up at him from beneath his eyelashes in a way that made Harry glad he was half-leaning back against the desk and that his Auror robes were quite voluminous. “I found my mates.”

Harry blushed. “I’m not sure how much of a consolation prize that is.”

“Trust me, you are not a consolation prize. But if you’d like, I can think of several ways you can make me feel better.”

Harry cleared his throat. “I’m at work, Draco.”

Draco smirked. “And I’d be happy for you to search me anytime, Auror Potter.”

Harry couldn’t help but picture searching Draco, and then bending him over his desk, lifting up his robe and…

“Maybe another time,” he muttered.

Draco grinned sharply. “I’ll keep that in mind.”

Draco left just before eleven o’clock, and despite the fact that nothing had actually happened, Harry knew that he would never be able to look at his desk quite the same way again.

Chapter End Notes

You all are seriously the best! :)

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